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THE MYSTERY CYCLE

(I) SOME TOWNELEY CYCLE PLAYS

I.

TOWARDS the close of her book, *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama*, Miss Phillpotts observes:

'We must not forget that Church drama and folk-drama are but the two streams into which the ancient Teutonic ritual drama divided on encountering the mediæval Church. They meet again in Elizabethan times, and through them there passed into the Shakespearean drama "a wealth of tradition and sentiment elsewhere intercepted by changes of language, religion and education". . . . In England the common Teutonic stock of ritual drama was reinforced by the influx of Scandinavian customs. The influence of the folk-play and the Church drama converged at an auspicious moment, and the ancient tradition took hold on a surer immortality in Shakespeare'.

These observations have the weight of Miss Phillpotts's book behind them. We cannot do better than take them as our starting-point and enquire whether the convergence of which she speaks may not be observed to have taken place earlier—in at least a number of the plays of the English Mystery Cycle.

There will be no need to recapitulate here the familiar history of how drama issued from the liturgy of the mediæval Christian Church; and how from the Latin Liturgical Drama there evolved gradually, through various stages, the whole vernacular Mystery Cycle as we have it in the three or four complete versions that have survived in English. That history, as it has been reconstructed in E. K. Chambers's *Mediæval Stage* is now well known. Latin Nativity and Easter Plays continued to have their places in the Church services throughout the Middle Ages. The vernacular Mystery Cycle may not, therefore, be said to have superseded the Latin Liturgical Drama from which it evolved; it simply became something separate, different and altogether bigger, the climax of the year in the community-life of the mediæval towns. The Mystery Cycle cannot therefore be explained in terms of the Latin Liturgical Drama alone. The earliest vernacular Christian Mystery Plays were, almost certainly, simple redactions from the Latin plays (which must have been more like opera than spoken drama). Indeed, some of the plays even in the surviving English versions of the Mystery Cycle still read like such redactions. But in others of the individual plays and perhaps in the Mystery Cycle as a whole, we may distinguish important elements which do not belong to the Latin Liturgical Drama, which must have come from some other source and which may, perhaps, only be accounted for by such a convergence as that of which Miss Phillpotts speaks.

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The Christian Liturgy itself had its origins in an earlier ritual that was not Christian, and, as Hocart shows in detail in his book *Kingship*, 'The Mass is indeed a mystery play'.[1] But, even if we grant that the whole English Mystery Cycle had its immediate origin—as distinguished from its remoter origins—solely in the Christian Liturgy, we should still find it impossible to explain how such a development could have taken place spontaneously from that Liturgy without relation to external conditions. The Liturgy has itself a dramatic character and potentialities. But we have still to discover what force, as it were, drew the new drama out from the Liturgy and made of it a separate object that expanded to the size and significance of the Mystery Cycle.

We may begin to find the answer by returning to the fact that dramatic ritual always has been a feature—indeed the central and characteristic feature—of religion in all parts of the world, and is not an invention of Christianity. As Miss Phillpotts and as Gronbech (in his book *The Culture of the Teutons*) show, a religious ritual drama had been the centre of life among the Scandinavian and Teutonic communities. As other scholars have shown (surely most relevantly for the history of drama in this island), the same was true of the Celts. It is reasonable to conjecture that people accustomed to a ritual drama not merely as an accessory of religion but as the essential of religion and indeed of life, would not cease to feel that it was essential after they had adopted Christianity. Without a ritual drama there could, for them, be no religion and no life.

Not only was the need for ritual drama still there, but the thing itself was still there; the pagan rituals were not simply or easily abolished by the new religion. We know how desperately, throughout the Middle Ages, people tried to keep up their ancient ritual dances and ceremonies even in the church-yards and church buildings themselves for the very reason that these were now regarded as the sacred places. There is ample evidence in the records of ecclesiastical prohibitions and anathemas of the trouble these practices—often regarded as devilish practices—caused the Church. But this negative ecclesiastical policy of repression was complemented by the positive remedy provided by the emergence of a Christian ritual drama and its remarkable development, corresponding to the size of the popular need, into the large-scale Mystery Cycle annually performed by the townspeople in their Craft Guilds at the height of the year (usually as an intrinsic part of the Corpus Christi ritual procession in June).

The plays of the Mystery Cycle—or some of them—can themselves alone provide the conclusive answer to the question of whether we can properly speak of a convergence already taking place. But that there was a great deal in the nature of drama still being practised among the people outside the churches which the Christian Drama—

[1] *Cp.* 'Thus the old beliefs which began before our earliest written records continue to supply Christianity with its imagery.'

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the new drama which had itself roots in the old—might not only find propitious to its growth but with which it might converge, we learn from other sources. It would indeed be an error to suppose that the only kind of dramatic performances in mediæval England were the Christian Mysteries (or the Moralities which, though later in beginning than the Mystery Cycle, did not supersede it but were for long contemporary with it). On the contrary, there is evidence of a multiplicity of dramatic or near-dramatic performances—ritual dances, games and ceremonies—widespread throughout mediæval Britain. There are numerous contemporary records and allusions (such as the allusions in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to 'layking of interludes' and 'Christmas gomes'). The fact that the words for these performances have not—except for a few fragmentary pieces—been preserved has the obvious explanation that, when there were words, they were not written down. Modern literary people have been too apt to neglect to take account of the great fact and importance of purely oral tradition.

But another reason, apart from the contemporary allusions to them, why we can feel certain that there must have been such dramatic rituals is that what are evidently their descendants have persisted among country folk almost to our own day and numerous versions of them have been recorded. The Mummers' Play, the Wooing (or Plough) Play, the Morris Dance, the Sword Dance have been considered in detail, notably by R. J. E. Tiddy and E. K Chambers, and it is now generally agreed that they are not the blundering efforts of the folk at dramatic creation but are the degenerate and confused remnants of an ancient, pre-Christian ritual drama as that has survived among the folk. If so, these dramatic rituals *must* certainly have been kept up, with no break in continuity, right through the Christian Middle Ages. The evidence of the contemporary records is that the performers in the May rites and plays of Robin Hood and in Christmas games and plays were not only peasant folk but also nobles and kings and queens. Whether or not these dramatic rituals deriving from an ancient Nature religion had an effect on the Christian Mystery Cycle and may be responsible for certain of its features—features which must have been incorporated after the Christian drama moved outside the church buildings—it should be possible for us to observe in individual cycle plays.

As for the view that the Christian drama was invented and devised by ecclesiastics to instruct an ignorant and illiterate populace in the facts of their religion, that it was intended as visual education for those who for the most part could not read, the Vulgate made visible as a sequence of *tableaux* for instructional purposes—the plays themselves do not seem to me to bear out such a view. The composition of the texts and the making and annual production of the Cycle as a whole no doubt involved a collaboration between clerks and the townspeople in their Craft Guilds. But that it was a collaboration and not merely the clerks instructing the people by the device of drama is evident from the nature of the drama itself.

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The historians of the drama have made much of the degradation and eclipse of drama at Rome during the decadence and of the fact that there is no continuity between the ancient Classical Drama and the mediæval Christian Drama. It would perhaps be more to the point to appreciate the parallel between the ritual origins of Greek drama and those of English drama. We should remember that even the Rome of the Empire was never quite the world. The ultimate origins of specifically English drama are to be sought at least partly in the customs and ceremonies of the Scandinavian, Teutonic and Celtic peoples. While the city of Rome was in its decadence there was still among the Northern peoples a professional class—a kind of priesthood—of poets, held in high honour and, indeed, veneration by kings and nobles. These 'makers' recited their poems before audiences in the great halls and must have also been a kind of noble actors. Whether or not the tradition originated, as the evidence indicates, in ritual drama those poems which have survived have—some more than others—a dramatic character. It is scarcely stretching a point to say that the last of the minstrels (fallen on evil days as they had done by the end of the Middle Ages) are the first of the Tudor actors; that the Elizabethan dramatists, including Shakespeare himself, are in the succession from the minstrel-makers of the earlier age. The verse—combining alliteration and rhyme—of several of the plays of the extant Northern versions of the Mystery Cycle itself suggests a relation between them and the tradition of alliterative poetry. These particular Cycle plays must be attributed to poets who, whether they were clerks or not, had close affinities with the minstrel-makers of the alliterative tradition.

II.

One reason why the Mystery Cycle is not a didactic drama is that, as a whole and for the greater part, it is still—as we may observe it in the three or four versions preserved in English—a ritual drama. Regarding it in retrospect from our modern viewpoint, we can see that it was in process of becoming what we should describe as the drama of art. A few of the cycle plays indeed stand out from the others, as seen from our viewpoint, as having passed beyond the purely ritual stage and become art. The term 'art' has unfortunately nowadays often a limiting, if not misleading, suggestion but it may serve here in making the necessary elementary distinction between art drama and ritual drama. Jane Harrison, in her book *Art and Ritual*, decides very clearly the point at which the one may be said to have become the other. It may be that it is not always possible or desirable in practice to make an absolutely sharp distinction, but that does not invalidate the general usefulness of the distinction. At the performance of a ritual there is no division into actors and audience. All present are, or are assumed to be, worshippers and therefore more or less active participators. But when part of the crowd—a part considerable enough to be felt as a distinct presence—has become separated onlookers or detached

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spectators the ritual drama begins to become art. There is now an audience; and as soon as there is an audience of whom the performers are conscious the performance itself will begin to change its nature in the direction of becoming a spectacle for spectators, a play presented to an audience. As the more inactive or contemplative among the worshippers have become spectators, so the active impersonators of gods or heroes in the ritual have become actors in a drama of art.

If the Mystery Cycle is a ritual drama we should not try to see it as if it were a chronicle play or episodic history of the world. Those concerned had evidently no idea of the kind of thing we think we mean by history, or no interest in it. Thus the anachronisms in the Mystery Cycle—as when Christ is spoken of as dead before he is born—have been naïvely assumed to be blunders by 19th century scholars and historians and their 20th century successors. If we are to think of the Mystery Cycle as history at all we have to think of it as altogether a different kind of history from what we think history is. In his chapter on the Creative Festival (or *blot*) Gronbech assists his readers to glimpse the nature of the ancient Teutonic ritual and—though I can only quote bits here—what he says may assist us also in seeking to avoid initial misunderstanding of the nature of the mediæval Mystery Cycle.

'Life and history start from the *blot*. Time is not experienced . . . in the way we feel it, as a stream running along from the origin of all things to the end of the universe. Time begins over and over again. The festival forms what we should call a stage above the flow of hours and years, a sort of condensed eternity . . . And from this very beginning, time, that is the subsequent year or six months, will flow out, made pregnant with the power and the events of *blot* hours. Thus it is also literally true that the real deeds are done in the *blot* hall, the battles and the harvestings of the outer world being but the external fulfilment of actions done during feast time or the evolving of ritual acts. The field is actually ploughed when the priest or chieftain thrusts his ploughshare into the soil and lets the oxen draw some three ritual furrows with appropriate formulæ and the recitation of the legend of the first ploughman. . . . The gods are present as power in the events and as persons in the sacrificers . . . This view suggests another type of history and another kind of poetry than ours. In reality, ancient history cannot be translated into our terms because it is not a theory but an experience; by saying that it is the projection of the actual upon the screen of the past we do nothing but replace fact with a travesty, setting up our system as an exclusive pattern of history . . . What we call poetry and myth is nothing but history . . . The legends will not tell us what happened some year or other according to chronology; in our craving for a kernel of historical truth in the myths, we naïvely insinuate that the myth-makers ought to think in a system unknown to them, for the benefit of our annalistic studies'.

The texts of the Mystery Cycle themselves show that the

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annually performed events of the cycle were not thought of as having happened once for all at successive times in the past. In the annual performance these events were not merely being commemorated. They were thought of as being done over again, as *having* to be done over again; in the course of the annual re-doing, indeed, they were probably experienced not so much even as events being re-done but as if they were being done for the first time there and then. Thus, even in the 20th century when in a Greek-Orthodox church the crowd at Easter at midnight shout 'Christ is risen', they do not feel that Christ rose nearly 2000 years ago but that Christ has at that very moment risen; an event of fundamental importance in their lives has at that moment happened. Jane Harrison (*Themis*, p. 202, f. 2) reports the gloom and anxiety in a Greek village the day before Easter in the early years of this century because, as one old peasant woman expressed it, 'If Christ does not rise tomorrow we shall have no corn this year'.

If we are to think of the Mystery Cycle as history, therefore, it should be as history that had to be annually re-made or renewed for the well-being of each and all of the community of people concerned. The past had to be re-made in order that the future, for that year, might be made and be propitious. Past and future are indeed mutually present in the Mystery Cycle. That the future is as present as the past we may realise from the fact that the Cycle regularly ends with what we regard as a future event, the Last Judgment. The Cycle must have been experienced as an annual renewal in which once again, as in past years and originally, the world is created, Lucifer (the light-bearer, the sun) is created and falls, man is created and falls, Christ (the true sun) is born, is put to death but victoriously 'harrows Hell' and rises again; finally, the world is judged—and the next year again witnesses its creation and again the whole cycle, a ritual of never-ending life from Creation to Judgment. The crowd must have been essentially sharers or partakers with the performers—who were themselves not actors in our sense but impersonators—in events which were to them the significant events of the year. We may be sure that these events were more significant to the participants, who were the whole community, than those events of the same year which we now call the history of that year; life itself, as they understood it, was felt by them to originate in the ritual, to depend upon it and to derive from it all its meaning.

We shall now be better able to understand what Gronbech tries to explain earlier in the same chapter. 'In the ritual man assumes the power of creating life . . . Not only the future needed creation, the past too had to be renewed in the *blot* to retain its reality. The eternity of life lay not in the fact that it had once begun, but solely in the fact that it was constantly being begun, so that the *blot*-man's sacrifice points back as well as forward. In order to do justice to the meaning of the *blot*, we must say that it not only condenses and renews the past, but in true earnest creates it over and over again. This reiteration or renovation, as we should

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call it, is not a repetition of an act primarily and for all times created years or ages ago. The present re-acting is as primary, as original as the very first acting; and the participants are not witnesses to the deed of some hero or god, not reproducers who revive the deed, but simply and literally the original heroes who send fateful deeds into the world, whether it be battles long ago or the creation of Middle-garth'.

It is difficult for us to understand creation rites—and almost all rites turn out to be creation rites of one kind or another; thus, coronation rites make a king, initiation rites make a new man. It is especially difficult for us to understand how those concerned could ever have supposed that they were creating the world itself, and even the gods. But, as Hocart explains, the idea was not of creating something out of nothing; but rather of treating or renovating the earth (for example) so as to make it fertile, useful and fit for human habitation, in that sense to inaugurate it, to bring it into being. Myths of creation, if we may believe what now seems the most authoritative and credible view, are simply records of ancient creation rites. The first chapter of Genesis itself, as Hocart explains it, is none other than a record of ancient Hebrew creation rites that lasted for six days. (To recognise that should not be to deny the universal significance which the chapter has come to possess as poetry.) As Hocart further explains, the Old Norse mythological description of the world is none other than a fairly literal description not of the geographical world but of the circular mound encircled by a ditch which, for ritual purposes, signified all things; the great ash, Yggdrasil, whose branches overspread the world, including the abode of the gods, and whose roots penetrate the underworld, is simply (he thinks) the sacred ash which surmounted the sacred mound signifying all things. Thus when, at the very beginning of the Mystery Cycle, God creates the world—Heaven and Hell, the Earth, angels and man—he creates what is visible and substantial before the worshippers as the 'pageant' stage and all that is on it; he says in effect to that simple wooden structure, 'Be Heaven and Hell and Middle-earth', and behold, it is so.

If we agreed that the Mystery Cycle is for the most part not yet art but is still as a whole at the ritual stage, we shall agree that it does not present an 'action' so as to be fully intelligible to an audience unfamiliar with it beforehand. The Mystery Cycle is not in fact representational or fully self-explanatory of an action; it does not unfold or expose an action as for an audience who expect to be shown, so as to understand, what happened and how it happened, how it began, evolved and ended. The reason for this (to our minds) deficiency is obvious enough if there was not, as yet, assumed to be any audience. The impersonator, indeed, often proclaims who he is, narrates his past acts or announces his future intentions. If the purpose of such declarations is merely explanatory, we must ask who requires such explanations. Those present certainly knew already all that they came to see and knew what

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to expect without having to be told. It is more likely that what the impersonator is doing is not explaining to an audience but simply establishing, for himself and for everyone present, his identity with a ritual personage already well known whose acts are equally fore-known and pre-arranged.

The modern reader, who would of course prefer to see the whole Mystery Cycle as a drama according to his conception, is naturally baffled by the gaps in what appears to him an imperfect sequence of events. From a drama he is accustomed—no doubt rightly—to expect the apprehensible detailed unity of structure of a complete work of art. The Greek tragedies are such; and so are those of Shakespeare. But we shall continue to misunderstand the Mystery Cycle if we try to regard it as a blundering effort at art instead of as still, as a whole, at the stage of ritual. We can see from our historical viewpoint that it is in process of becoming art—comedy or tragedy—and we can see that there are individual cycle-plays which we may claim to have become art, to be genuine dramatic poems. It is these few outstanding plays which are properly the object of literary criticism; and it is on one or two of these which I propose we should therefore concentrate our attention. But we should recognise that the Mystery Cycle is not merely not intended to be art but that it is not, as a whole, art. We should recognise this fact specifically in relation to those few individual cycle-plays which we claim to be indeed dramatic poems; because their significance as dramatic poems may perhaps be shown still to be rooted in their significance as ritual. In having become—or been made into—dramatic poems they should not be assumed to have lost or disowned their earlier purely ritual significance; it is, indeed, on their original ritual significance that the depth and complexity of their final significance as dramatic poems may be shown largely to depend.

The abruptness and incoherence of ritual texts, in contrast to the coherence and completeness of those of art, is remarked on by Gronbech in the chapter already quoted. 'For the participants themselves, the story was made up of acts complemented by *formælis* and verses. This means that we shall not be able to gather the meaning either from the words only or from the action alone; both must be taken together to bring out the whole'. In a Shakespearean dramatic poem it is in and through the words of the poetry that the drama is created; the action springs from and, in the physical sphere, corresponds to the words, so that the reader involuntarily imagines it even though he has never seen the play produced in a theatre. The words of the poetry compel the imagination to realise the developing action in all its completeness. Words and acts are fused expressions or aspects of one and the same creative or pattern-making energy of life. But in the case of the versions of the Mystery Cycle as a whole there is not this kind of completeness. The explanation seems to be, as Gronbech suggests, that in ritual words have a different function. They seem to be added to or to accompany the acts, to complement them, to lend them additional force or,

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often, to alternate with them, to *replace* acts altogether, themselves to assume the force of acts. In the ritual *flytings* the words appear to replace or be equivalent to blows or missiles hurled against the antagonist to damage him; they seem to belong to the phase when words were conceived to have magic powers. In a characteristic ritual text there are consequently gaps which in a performance would presumably have been filled with acts, just as there would have been gaps in the action filled with recited formulæ. We can understand, therefore, why such texts are often awkward in places for a reader and why they sometimes leave him comparatively unmoved; the feelings and tensions of the worshippers, which were no doubt often ecstatic, surely did not arise from these words alone. The crowd of participants, caught up in the annual cycle of well-known significant events, could have had no need of a complete verbal rendering of these events. Nor should we assume that at the purely ritual stage of drama the impersonator had as yet any thought of interpreting an action to an audience or of impressing an audience. His intention of impressing, if he had any, would not have been directed at anyone outside the ritual—there *was* no one outside—but would have been directed, with singleness of purpose, at his antagonist or someone else *within* the ritual. Because the action of the Mystery Cycle is thus not yet, as a whole, turned outwards towards any audience, it is not as a whole turned outwards towards the modern reader. It is half-hidden, only intermittently imaginable by a reader of the texts.

III.

It is now time to turn to our specific subject—or object—the texts which alone concretely exist in the present for our observation. There must have been numerous local versions of the Mystery Cycle differing in dialect and in detail from one town to another. But only four complete—or nearly complete—versions still exist, the Chester, the York, the Towneley MS. Cycle and the 'N-towne Cycle'. The last named has often been know as the 'Ludus Coventriae', though its English appears to be that of East Anglia and not of the Coventry district; it appears to differ from the three Northern Cycles in not being processional. There are, in addition, a number of single plays which probably had their places in the now vanished Cycles of various towns.

The particular plays which I propose to consider have their places in the version of the Mystery Cycle preserved in the Towneley MS. This version of the Cycle is thought to have been the one performed at Wakefield in Yorkshire. There is evidence from the three Northern texts preserved that towns borrowed and worked on one another's texts in producing their local versions of the Cycle. Several of the plays in the Wakefield Cycle appear to have been borrowed from the York Cycle—unless (as has been suggested) both York and Wakefield derived them from some parent-cycle. Though the Towneley MS. has been dated about the third quarter of the 15th

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century, it is generally thought that the version of the Cycle which it preserves had already assumed more or less the form in which we have it by the end of the first quarter of the century. Many different hands at different times appear to have worked on the making of the Wakefield Cycle, as in the making of a cathedral, adding to it and altering it; it appears to be more heterogeneous in this respect than the Chester and York Cycles. It is possible to distinguish different layers or strata, most likely chronological, older and more recent strata, as in a geological structure. Thus Pollard distinguished broadly three different strata in the Towneley MS. Cycle; it is possible to distinguish more, as indeed scholars have since done without (I think) discrediting the rightness of Pollard's broad distinctions.

The plays which I propose chiefly to consider appear to belong to the latest stratum (which has been dated as early 15th century). These plays have so many characteristics in common and are so outstanding in similar ways that they have resulted in the hypothesis of a single dramatic poet of genius who composed them and who composed also parts of other plays in the Cycle—the so-called Wakefield Master. These short plays are (we may claim) dramatic poems and the proper objects of literary criticism. But their significance as dramatic poems—as art—cannot perhaps be dissociated from their origin in ritual. Further, it may be possible to observe in them to what extent their ritual origins may be described as pre-Christian, whether there may be observed in them already that convergence of traditions of which Miss Phillpotts speaks. If they are the work of a single poet, then that poet himself—as his verse shows—belonged in a tradition or school which may be claimed as at least related to that of the alliterative poetry of the 14th century.

Each individual play should of course be viewed in its place in the whole Cycle. I cannot do more here than indicate the place of each of the plays which I shall consider. As I have already remarked, the Cycle regularly begins with the Creation. Thus the Towneley version begins with a monologue spoken by God ('I am Alpha and Omega') in which he announces each act of Creation. The Towneley version of the Fall of Lucifer immediately follows; it is less complete and impressive than the formally antiphonal York version (in which the brief dialogue between the fallen angels has, however, a grim humour resembling that of the dialogues between devils in the Towneley play of the Last Judgment). Twelve pages of the Towneley MS. are missing where we should expect the episode of the Fall of Man. Instead, we come next to the play of Cain and Abel (Towneley MS. No. 2). Parts of this play have been attributed to the Wakefield Master; but we should be careful not to attribute every racily engaging or lively piece in the Cycle to a single master. We may, however, claim some of the dialogue (despite the grim theme of brother slaying brother) as already comedy or farce for an audience. Cain and his boy are robust farcical characters, the perennial pair of quarrelling clowns. Cain is a surly ill-tempered peasant farmer, with a grievance against

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everything, a grouser; he abuses his horses and his boy, and is familiarly disrespectful to God himself.

> Whi, who is that hob-over-the-wall?

The reader of Elizabethan plays might well find the series of asides in which the boy mocks his master already typically Elizabethan. It is not, however, this play which I propose first to consider in detail but the play which immediately follows it, the Play of Noah (Towneley MS. No. 3).

IV.

The play of Noah (one of those attributed to the Wakefield Master) is a variation on the theme of the whole Cycle in which it is an episode. The Cycle begins with the Creation and ends with the destruction of what was created—except that (in this Christian cycle) there is a Last Judgment in which the souls of mankind are conserved for Salvation or Damnation. The play of Noah has for *its* theme a pattern of destruction and renewal, the destruction of what was created, because it has fallen or declined, and its subsequent renewal or re-creation. The play moves with a sure rhythm throughout to the completion of its ordered and unified structure; it is a dramatic poem, complete in itself, yet a significant part of the larger whole.

The play begins with a monologue spoken by the ageing Noah—a masterly recapitulation of the initial episodes of the whole Cycle. Noah speaks first of God the Creator and of the variety and abundance of His creatures.

> Myghtfull god veray Maker of all that is,
> Thre persons withoutten nay oone god in endles blis,
> Thou maide both nyght and day beest, fowle, and fysh,
> All creatures that lif may wroght thou at thi wish . . .

He recalls the creation of the angels, the fall of Lucifer and finally the creation and fall of Man. He meditates on man's sinfulness and reflects that he himself is growing old. This theme of Noah growing old accords with that of the general decline

> And now I wax old,
> seke, sory, and cold,
> As muk apon mold
> I widder away.

But Noah will yet 'wax and multiply' after the Flood—'at the next world, that is at the next spring'.[2]

Noah's monologue is succeeded by a monologue spoken by God in which He meditates on the failure of His created work or, at least, on Man's failure. God will therefore destroy his Creation. But He provides for a renewal of mankind and indeed of all life

[2]A Nocturnal upon St. Lucies Day (Donne).

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by the preservation of Noah and all who are to go with him into the Ark. The first dialogue in the play is between God and Noah, in which God instructs Noah to build a ship, and promises

> Ye shall wax and multiply,
> And fill the erth agane,
> When all thise floodis ar past . . .

The second dialogue is a farcical contrast—a flyting between Noah and his wife, the forerunner of more flyting to come. The flyting match precedes an actual exchange of blows. (The exchange between Alisoun and Clerk Jankyn in the Wife of Bath's monologue develops this familiar or stock pattern).

> Noe. We! hold thi tong, ram-skyt or I shall the still.
> Vxor. By my thryft, if thou smyte I shal turne the untill.
> Noe. We shall assay as tyte have at the, Gill!
> Apon the bone shal it byte.
> Vxor. A, so, mary! thou smytis ill!

Surely this buffoonery is an example of that joking 'in the presence of death, real or mystical', which we shall meet again in the Shepherds' Plays.

The building of the Ark was evidently an intrinsic part of the performance, expressing (at one level) pride of craft, the craft of carpentry or boat-building. But the boat-building episode is not introduced simply as realism. The ship that is being constructed is the very special ship that is to weather the Flood—between two worlds—with frail humanity, vulnerable life in its keeping; it is the life-bearing vessel or womb of life. Like the boat in *Marina* ('I made this, I have forgotten') it may properly be regarded as symbolical—as well as realistic. Noah, as he takes off his gown and labours at the making of the ship, is made very conscious by his aches and pains that he has grown old.

> A! my bak, I traw, will brast! this is a sory note!
> hit is wonder that I last sich an olde dote
> All dold,
> To begyn sich a wark!
> My bonys ar so stark,
> No wonder if thay wark,
> for I am full old.

As the storm gathers and breaks and increases in violence Noah's wife has her second outbreak; so, once again, there is buffoonery in the presence of death. Impressions of the rising flood—halls, castles and towers falling beneath the force of the storm—combine with her rebelliousness. The comedy of this episode of the intransigent wife is the more piquant here in that it is at just such a critical moment that she should choose to be awkward. She appears to be sublimely careless as the flood rises. She will not go into the Ark till she has done her spinning. It is as if there were some

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hidden fateful relation between her spinning, the brewing-up of the storm and, perhaps, the eventual renewal of life.

Vxor. Sir, for Jak nor for Gill will I turne my face
Till I have on this hill spon a space
on my rok;
Well were he, myght get me,
Now will I downe set me,
Yit reede I no man let me,
for drede of a knok.

Noe. Behold to the heven the cateractes all,
That are open full even grete and small,
And the planettis seven left has thare stall;
Thise thoners and levyn downe gar fall
full stout,
Both halles and bowers,
Castels and towres;
full sharp ar thise showers,
that renys aboute;
Therfor, wife, have done com into ship fast.

Vxor. Yei, Noe, go cloute thi shone the better will thai last.

Prima mulier. Good moder, com in sone for all is over cast,
Both the son and the mone.

Secunda mulier. and many wynd blast
full sharp;
Thise floodis so thay ryn,
Therfor moder come in.

Vxor. In fayth yit will I spyn;
All in vayn ye carp.

Tertia mulier. If ye like ye may spyn Moder, in the ship.

'Ye may spyn, Moder, in the ship' sounds reasonable enough. The climax of this second flyting is a second exchange between husband and wife as she enters the Ark precipitately, having at last apparently realised the danger. The children wish for a reconciliation, and this again has, perhaps, a significance in relation to what follows.

The final movement of the dramatic poem is on the theme of the subsidence of the Flood and the reappearance of the green earth. There is a spring impression and a joyful feeling of wonder and of reverent gratitude at the miracle—surely an annual miracle—of restoration and renewal.

Now are the weders cest and cateractes knyt,
Both the most and the leest.

Vxor. Me thynk, bi my wit,
The son shynes in the eest lo, is not yond it?
we shuld have a good feest were thise floodis flyt
So spytus.

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They have been in the Ark 350 days—that is, virtually, a year.

Vxor. Bot, husband,
What grownd may this be?

Noe. The hyllys of armonye.

Vxor. Now blissid be he
That thus far us can ordand!

Noe. I see toppys of hyllys he many at a syght,
No thyng to let me the wedir is so bright.

Vxor. Thise ar of mercy tokyns full right.

Noe. Dame, thi counsell me what fowll best myght,
And cowth,
with flight of wyng
bryng, without taryying,
Of mercy som tokynyng
Ayther bi north or southe?

Husband and wife are now harmonious; Noah asks his wife which bird they might release from the Ark to bring a sign or token. The dove brings back the olive branch—the olive branch that was annually carried in the spring festivals in Greece and the Mediterreanean lands.

The dowfe is more gentill her trust I untew,
like unto the turtill for she is ay trew.

Vxor. Hence bot a litill she commys, lew, lew!
she bryngys in her bill som novels new;
Behald!
It is of an olif tre
A branch, thynkys me.

Noe. It is soth, perde,
right so is it cald.

What has re-animated and re-created the Noah Play in this version, working in and through the poetry, enriching its significance, is clearly the seasonal theme of the Nature rituals, the festivals of the Year. This, then, is the other source of life which the Christian drama found when it passed out of the church-buildings and among the people.

V.

The play which comes next after that of Noah in the Cycle is the Play of Abraham and Isaac (Towneley MS. No. 4). The significance, in the Cycle, of the sacrifice of Isaac is as an analogue or foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Christ, the Son by the Father. But it happens to be one of the Cycle plays which is especially interesting to modern readers who are on the look-out for the emergence of drama in their sense—tragedy or comedy. The situation has not only the elements of tragedy in it—the tragedy of a

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father under an overriding obligation or doom to slay his own son—but to some extent this situation, the pity of it, the suspense and the element of unexpectedness, is realised in the play (as when the son asks, 'Where is the beest that shuld be brend?'). The situation in itself is as peculiarly tragic as those situations of a son doomed to slay his father, or a brother his brother, which are among the themes of the Greek tragedies. Such situations may perhaps be traced back (as Miss Phillpotts does) to an original ritual situation in which the king is doomed to be slain by his successor (he may be his son or brother) who is doomed to marry the queen (she may be his mother or sister). But the Play of Abraham and Isaac is not one of the plays I intend to consider here. I intend to pass on at once to certain of the plays in the sequence about Christ which forms the greater proportion—and the climax—of the whole Mystery Cycle. The Christ sequence, of which all the preceding plays of the Cycle are preliminary, may be said to begin with the lovely Play of the Annunciation (Towneley MS. No. 10) and its companion play, the Salutation of Elizabeth (No. 11) both of which Pollard regarded as belonging to the earliest stratum of the Towneley MS. Cycle. It is immediately after them that the two Towneley Shepherds' Plays come (Nos. 12 and 13).

VI.

What has happened in the Noah Play has happened again still more interestingly in the two Towneley versions of the Shepherds' Play. Both plays are among those attributed to a single Wakefield Master; and if we are to have a Wakefield Master they are indeed sufficiently similar in texture to each other and to different plays of the group to justify their both being assigned to him. Though the second is the better known, the first seems to me quite as interesting; both are richly significant dramatic poems.

The first play begins with a monologue spoken by a First Shepherd (Gyb) on the theme of winter downfall and poverty—the theme of 'Wynter wakneth al my care'. He envies the dead; they are free from vicissitudes.

> Lord, what thay ar weyll that hens ar past!
> for thay noght feyll theym to downe cast.
> here is mekyll unceyll and long has it last,
> Now in hart, now in heyll now in weytt, now in blast,
> Now in care,
> Now in comforth agane,
> Now is fayre, now is rane,
> Now in hart full fane,
> And after full sare.
>
> Thus this Warld, as I say farys on ylk syde,
> for after oure play com sorrows unryde;
> for he that most may When he syttys in pryde,
> When it comys on assay is kesten downe wyde,
> This is seyn;

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When ryches is he,
Then comys poverte,
hors-man Iak Cope
Walkys then, I weyn.

All his sheep are gone, and his 'purs is bot wake'. The monologue is, however, not quite all a complaint; there is a more hopeful note in its ending. Gyb is on his way to the fair to buy more sheep. Once again, as in the Noah Play, there is promise of a new abundance—at the next spring.

To the fare will I me,
To by shepe, perde,
And yit may I multyple,
for all this hard case.

On his way to the fair he meets the Second Shepherd (John Horne) who enters addressing the crowd at the play directly in a second monologue. May God save us all from the different kinds of evil men who are multiplying—as they may have seemed to be doing in the contemporary England of the play, as it was traditionally believed they would do towards the end of the world and as they appear to do with the failure of life energies in winter and as darkness multiplies. Degree is overthrown in the increasing confusion that seems to attend the winter overthrow.

Benste, benste be us emang,
And save all that I se here in this thrang,
he save you and me ouertwhart and endlang,
That hang on a tre I say you no wrang;
Cryst save us
from all myschefys,
from robers and thefys,
from those mens grefys,
That oft ar agans us.

Both bosters and bragers god kepe us fro,
That with thare long dagers dos mekyll wo;
from all byll hagers with colknyfys that go;
Sich wryers and wragers gose to and fro
for to crak.
Who so says hym agane,
were better be slane;
Both ploghe and wane
Amendys will not make.

He will make it as prowde a lord as he were,
With a hede lyke a clowde felterd his here;
he spekys on lowde with a grym bere,
I wold not have trowde so galy in gere
As he glydys.

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I wote not the better,
Nor wheder is gretter,
The lad or the master,
So stowtly he strydys.

John Horne hails Gyb, who is apparently straying over the corn, and the two shepherds greet each other.

Secundus pastor.

How, Gyb, goode morne wheder goys thou?
Thou goys over the corne Gyb, I say, how!

Primus pastor.

Who is that? John Horne I make god a vowe!

They agree that 'poore men ar in the dyke'.

The strange buffoonery of the dialogue that follows is surely no more accidental than is that of the mock-nativity—the dead sheep in the cradle—in the Second Towneley Shepherds' Play. It is in the unbroken tradition in which, all over the world almost, joking and buffoonery have been associated with death; ceremonial joking (as Hocart explains) often indicates 'the presence of death, real or mystical'. What gives rise to this buffoonery appears to be the association of death and re-birth, the one presupposing the other and setting up an endless cycle. We may recall, as one classic example, the episode of the drunken Herakles in the *Alcestis* of Euripides—the buffoonery which precedes the hero's wrestling-match with Death and his restoration of Alcestis.

In our present play, Gyb tells John Horne he is going to the fair to buy sheep (his sheep, as he supposes, having all died in the winter). Thereupon the two shepherds quarrel about where he shall feed them, since there is evidently not grass enough to go round. Suddenly Gyb starts shouting like a madman at imaginary sheep, the sheep he has not yet bought at the fair. Thus we have a farcical fantasy. In the midst of the winter dearth, when the shepherds have no real sheep left—or only a few—there is suddenly all round them an illusion of abundance, a multiplicity of phantasmal sheep. This make-believe abundance—their own make-believe, it seems—is not there as a mockery of them in the season of deprivation. The tone is rather one of jollity as if what is seen is a promise of the spring abundance that is indeed certain. The buffoonery of the shepherds is, it seems, a significant Christmas game in this Christmas play—a game intended perhaps magically to help to induce the abundance it pre-figures. Gyb and John Horne shout contradictory orders at the (as yet) purely imaginary sheep and involve themselves in a wildly farcical medley.

Primus pastor.

I go to by shepe.

Secundus pastor.

nay, not so;
What, dreme ye or slepe? where shuld thay go?
here shall thou none kepe.

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Primus pastor.

A, good sir, ho!
Who am I?
I wyll pasture my fe
where so ever lykys me,
here shall thou theym se.

Secundus pastor.

Not so hardy!
Not oone shepe tayll shall thou bryng hedyr.

Primus pastor.

I shall bryng, no fayll a hundreth togedyr.

Secundus pastor.

What, art thou in ayll longys thou oght whedir?

Primus pastor.

Thay shall go, saunce fayll go now, Bell Weder!

Secundus pastor.

I say, Tyr!

Primus pastor.

I say, Tyr, now agane!
I say skyp over the plane.

Secundus pastor.

Wold thou never so fane,
Tup, I say, whyr!

Primus pastor.

What, wyll thou not yit I say, let the shepe go?

In the midst of the confusion the Third Shepherd, appropriately named Slaw-pace, arrives—as the New Year itself seems to do in winter—late.

Secundus pastor.

Here comys Slaw-pase
fro the myln whele.

Tertius pastor.

What a do, what a do is this you betweyn?

Like a chorus, he comments that here are two *old* knaves fighting about nothing, and he compares them proverbially with Moll.

Ye brayde of Mowll that went by the way—
Many shepe can she poll bot oone had she ay—
Bot she happynyd full fowll hyr pycher, I say,
Was broken;
'Ho, god', she sayde,
bot oone shepe yit she hade,
The mylk pycher was layde,
The skarthis was the tokyn.

Gyb and Horne are old in this play for the same symbolic reason, perhaps, as Noah.

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This Slaw-pace carries a bag on his back; but it is empty. He shakes it out in front of everyone—so that it can be seen to be quite empty—as a conjuror might do, because later out of the same empty sack will come food and drink in never-ending abundance. Meanwhile he compares the bag, empty of meal, to the wits of the old shepherds; but surely the empty sack is at the same time symbolical of the whole winter dearth.

Hold ye my mare this sek thou thrawe
On my bak,
Whylst I, with my hand,
lawse the sek band;
Com nar and by stand
Both Gyb and Jak,
Is not all shakyn owte and no meyll is therin?

Primus pastor.
Yey, that is no dowte.

A boy appears (Jak garcio) and the contrast of Youth and Age must have been visible. He reveals that Gyb's sheep are not, apparently, lost after all. On the contrary they are in grass to the knee. The wonder is whence comes this abundance of grass, this miracle of fertility on a midwinter night. We may associate it with such legends as that of the cherry tree that blossomed on Christmas Eve (for it is, of course, Christmas Eve).

Immediately following the good news that the sheep are found there is yet another apparent miracle. Although the shepherds have complained of winter and starvation they unexpectedly produce between them—and even out of Slaw-pace's empty bag—a sudden abundance of food and drink, a more than substantial Yule feast. This miraculous feast immediately preceding the birth of Christ reminds one of those windfalls of food and drink that regularly accompany the appearances of the Grail. Appropriately for Yule, it is a boar feast; Gronbech shows how the boar was the sacred animal, indeed a divinity, among the ancient Scandinavian and Teutonic peoples and how at the sacred boar feast the life and strength of the boar entered into those who feasted upon it. Gronbech shows in the same context how the ale also was, among these peoples, a divinity whose life they drank. In our present play, Christian though it is, the ale of the shepherds' Yule feast is still spoken of as holy and is described as 'boyte of oure bayll', a phrase commonly used of Christ.

Secundus pastor.
Lay furth of oure store,
lo, here! browne of a bore,

Primus pastor.
Set mustard afore,
oure mete now begyns;
here a foote of a cowe well sawsed, I wene,

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The pestell of a sowe that powderd has bene,
Two blodyngis, I trow A leveryng betwene;
Do gladly, syrs, now my breder bedene,
With more.
Both befe, and moton
Of an ewe that was roton,
Good mete for a gloton;
Ete of this store.

Secundus pastor.
I have here in my mayll sothen and rost,
Even of an ox tayll that wold not be lost;
ha, ha, goderhayll! I let for no cost,
A good py or we fayll this is good for the frost
In a mornyng;
And two swyne gronys,
All a hare bot the lonys,
we myster no sponys
here, at oure mangyng.

Tertius pastor.
Here is to recorde the leg of a goys,
with chekyns endorde pork, partryk, to roys;
a tart for a lorde how thynk ye this doys?
A calf lyver skorde with the verjose;
Good sawse,
This is a restorete
To make a good appete.

Primus pastor.
Yee speke all by clergete,
I here by your clause;
Cowth ye by youre gramery reche us a drynk,
I shuld be more mery ye wote what I thynk.

Secundus pastor.
Have good ayll of hely bewar now, I wynk,
for and thou drynk drely in thy poll wyll it synk.

Primus pastor.
A, so;
This is boyte of oure bayll,
good holsom ayll.

Tertius pastor.
Ye hold long the skayll,
Now lett me go to.

Yet another bottle is found—'yit a botell here is'.

Can we mistake that what has once again taken possession of the Christian cycle here, and re-created it, is the tradition of the pre-Christian dramatic rituals as they still flourished among the

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people? Shakespeare later is still drawing profoundly on the same source, as in the sheep-shearing festival in *A Winter's Tale*[3] There is no loss of the new Christian significance by this enrichment from an older tradition; thus the shepherds agree, with Christian charity, that the food and drink left over from the abundance of the unexpected feast should be distributed among the poor.

> For oure saules lett us do
> Poore men gyf it to.

Having first asked Christ's blessing, the shepherds sleep after the feast and are wakened by the angel—'he spake of a barne'. There is the same feeling of wonder again in *A Winter's Tale* when, after the tempest and the shipwreck and the man eaten by the bear (images of death), the old shepherd (again a *shepherd*) finds on the sea-shore a new-born child—'Mercy on's a barne; a very pretty barne'. The star looks like the lightning to Slaw-pace as he leans on a stone—an image that may well date back to the association of the Sun-god with the lightning; it is, we may remind ourselves, in the midwinter night that the new sun is born.

The dramatic poem ends with the Adoration of the Shepherds.[4] Each of the Three Shepherds, as he recites or sings (probably sings) his part in what is in effect a dramatic Christmas carol, presents a gift—a spruce coffer, a ball and a bottle—to the new-born divine child. It is perhaps not too fanciful to suppose that the bottle is the very same as that out of which earlier in the play the 'holy ale'—'boyte of oure bayll'—was drunk by the shepherds. The gifts of the Three Shepherds (as of the Three Kings) have surely some relation to the magical or otherwise rich gifts which are bestowed on a new-born child or found beside an exposed child in so many folk tales and which often have to do with the ultimate recognition of his supernatural or royal origin and status.

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[3]It seems perfectly possible that even if Shakespeare as a child did not see the Mystery Cycle himself he would have been told about the old performances by those who had seen them. This might help to account for the sheep-shearing scene in *A Winter's Tale* and indeed the whole symbolism and some of the details being traditional.

[4]The shepherds are music critics; they criticise, with evident knowledge of what they are talking about, the technique and quality of the angels' singing. This accords with the evidence that music and singing were accomplishments widespread among the people in the 14th century. But when Gyb, the shepherd, quotes the Latin of Virgil's fourth *Eclogue*, John Horne protests

> Tell us no clerge I hold you of the freres,
> ye preche;
> It semys by youre laton
> ye have lerd youre Caton.

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VII.

Because the Second Towneley Shepherds' Play includes the episode of the sheep-stealing, involving the characters, Mak and his wife Gyll, it has been acclaimed the first English comedy; we should have to add 'the first that has chanced to be preserved'. The excellently stage-managed farce of the concealment and discovery of the stolen sheep in the cradle certainly implies an *audience*—an audience who are in the know that the sheep is in the cradle and who may be counted on to hold their breath in suspense when the shepherds unexpectedly turn back to Mak's cottage (having inopportunely recollected that they have given no gift to the newborn child) and so make the discovery that the supposed child is the sheep. Since in this way it assumes an audience to appreciate it, the episode is already (if we apply Jane Harrison's distinction between art and ritual) art drama; it is comedy presented to, and for, an audience.

But it is the more significant as art drama because it has so immediately grown out of ritual drama; and because it is a dramatic poem in which the Christian Mystery Cycle has, once again, been crossed and enriched by the other tradition, the tradition of all that has been grouped under the heading of the Folk Play. Less than justice has been done to it as significant art even by those who have praised it; they have praised it too simply as farce, light comic relief intruded into the old solemn Nativity Play. Instead, it needs to be insisted that the play *is* a poem. The ancient association in dramatic ritual between dance and drama is still immediate in the vigorous, dancing rhythm that carries right through to the play's end. The deliberately broken, realistic dialogue, diversifying without breaking the strict stanzaic and metrical form, are carried along—like eddies within a steadily flowing larger current—within the unbroken dance-like metrical movement.

The progression or whole movement of the play is again, as in the First Towneley Shepherds' Play, from winter sorrow and death to the joyful birth. The play is again realism and something more, or other, than realism; so that if we regard it simply as realism emerging, as a dissociated element, from convention we shall miss a large and essential part of the meaning. The shepherds (as in the first play) certainly strike one as realistic reproductions of the folk, English peasant folk, like the folk who appear occasionally in Shakespeare's plays and quite unlike the shepherds of the Elizabethan pastoral convention. But (as in Shakespeare) they have their significant parts to play in a total poem.

The opening monologue spoken by the First Shepherd is a vigorous protest—no mere sorrowful musical complaint—against the winter distresses and oppressions suffered by the poor. The poor are oppressed not only by winter—that is bad enough—but in winter by the rich. Social grievances and vexations increase, once again not only because the social order seemed to be breaking up in the England contemporary with the play, but because it is

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winter, the season when the life energies that hold all things together begin to fail; the winter world (it was traditionally believed) prefigures the final end of all things when the world will fall into wrack and ruin. This note of vigorous and robust protest against the oppression of powerful, rich and evil men is the more readily absorbed—because it *is* vigorous and robust—in the jollity that strangely develops in the play; it seems, indeed, to reinforce the jollity which it is finally absorbed into. 'So feeling comes in aid of feeling' (Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Book XI).

Primus pastor.

Lord, what these weders ar cold! and I am yll happyd;
I am nere hande dold so long have I nappyd;
My legys thay fold my fyngers ar chappyd,
It is not as I wold for I am all lappyd
In sorow.
In stormes and tempest,
Now in the eest, now in the west,
wo is hym has never rest
Myd day nor morow!

Bot we sely shepardes that walkys on the moore,
In fayth we are nere handys outt of the doore;
No wonder as it standys if we be poore,
for the tylthe of oure landys lyys falow as the floore,
As ye ken.
We ar so hamyd,
for-taxed and ramyd,
We ar mayde hand tamyd,
with thyse gentlery men.

The Second Shepherd protests in his turn, as he enters, against the winter.

Lord, thyse weders ar spytus and the weders full kene.
And the frostys so hydus thay water myn eeyne,
No ly.
Now in dry, now in wete,
Now in snaw, now in slete,
When my shone freys to my fete,
It is not all esy.

His monologue as a whole is the protest of a husband against wives, a variation on the theme of the antagonism between Noah and his wife as the Flood rises.

For, as ever red I pystyll I have oone to my fere,
As sharp as a thystyll as rugh as a brere;
She is browyd lyke a brystyll with a sowre loten chere;
Had she oones wett hyr whystyll she couth syng full clere

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Hyr pater noster.
She is as greatt as a whall,
She has a galon of gall:
By hym that dyed for us all,
I wald I had ryn to I had lost hir.

The Third Shepherd (Daw) enters, just as the first two are asking what could have happened to him, and he compares the winter floods with Noah's; they evidently have a corresponding significance in this play.

Was never syn Noe floode sich floodys seyn;
Wyndys and ranys so rude and stormes so keyn;
Som stamerd, som stod in dowte, as I weyn;
Now God turne all to good I say as I mene,
for ponder.
These floodys so thay drowne,
Both in feldys and in towne,
And berys all downe,
And that is a wonder.

The note of seeing wonders, or at least of the unexpected, is present in Daw's monologue, and prepares for the miraculous events of the night of Christ's birth.

We that walk on the nyghtys oure catell to kepe,
We se sodan syghtys when othere men slepe.
Yit me thynk my hart lyghtys I se shrewys pepe.

Daw appears to be the servant of the other two shepherds; if they are poor, he, it seems, is still poorer. Yet the inhumanity which they have just complained of, they themselves in some measure enact; for when he begs for food and drink—he, too, is hungry in the winter—they upbraid him, as his masters, for being late. Daw then protests against the hard lot of servants.

Sich servandys as I that swettys and swynkys,
Etys oure brede full dry and that me forthynkys;
We ar oft weytt and wery when master-men wynkys,
Yit commys full lately both dyners and drynkys,
Bot nately.
Both oure dame and oure syre,
When we have ryn in the myre,
Thay can nyp at oure hyre,
And pay us full lately.

When the first two shepherds ask him where their sheep are, Daw answers that he has left them in the corn; though everything is topsy-turvey, the beginnings of the reversal to better fortune is indicated by Daw's news that the sheep have 'pasture good'.

Secundus pastor.
Wher ar oure shepe, boy, we skorne?

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Tertius pastor.
Sir, this same day at morne
I thaym left in the corne,
When thay rang lawdys;
Thay have pasture good thay can not go wrong.

Because their sheep appear to be well provided for after all, the Three Shepherds sing together a mirthful part-song—and to the accompaniment of the shepherds' singing Mak enters, and the Mak farce commences.

The central episode of the farce, the discovery of the stolen sheep in the cradle by the Three Shepherds, is clearly a kind of parody of the serious subject of the whole Nativity Play, a mock-nativity. In the final episode of the whole play the new-born Christ in the cradle—probably, in the performance, the same cradle—is adored by the same shepherds. In the farcical episode (the spirit of which is similar to that of the popular beast fables) a beast is found in the cradle.

What the dewill is this? he has a long snowte . . .
Sagh I never in a credyll
A hornyd lad or now.

Finally, the infant God is found in the cradle between two beasts.

In a cryb full poorely,
Betwyx two bestys.

The phrase 'little day starne' is first used by one of the shepherds of what he supposes to be Mak's child and the audience knows to be the sheep; the same phrase is later in the play used of the Christ child (as, indeed, it is commonly used in the carols of the Christ child).

The 'hornyd lad' in the cradle has certainly a still more particular significance. He can be none other than the 'horned god'—the God incarnated as goat or sheep, bull or stag—whose worship, as the evidence assembled in Margaret Murray's *God of the Witches* shows, continued throughout mediæval Britain. To quote but one instance, together with her own comments, from her chapter, The Horned God: 'In 1303, the Bishop of Coventry was accused before the Pope of doing homage to the Devil in the form of a sheep. The fact that a man in so high a position as a bishop could be accused of practising the Old Religion shows that the cult of the Horned God was far from being dead, and that it was in all probability still the chief worship of the bulk of the people. It should be also noticed that this is one of the first British records in which the old God is called the Devil by the Christian writers of the Middle Ages.' The point about the 'hornyd lad' in the Christ-child's cradle could not have been missed by the crowd at the Mystery Cycle; though whether the joke was at the expense of the New Religion or the Old might depend on whether one chose to regard the 'hornyd lad' as displacing the Christ-child in the cradle or the other way round.

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It is difficult to suppose that the joke could have been much relished by clerics, unless by such as were themselves also adherents of the Old Religion; there is some evidence that many were. The attempts of the Church authorities to suppress the Mystery Cycle can be accounted for if it seemed to them that within the Christian Cycle itself the Old Religion was rearing its head as a dangerous rival.

'So frequently is joking and buffoonery associated in various parts of the world with death', says Hocart in *Kingship*, 'that when we come across ceremonial joking it is advisable to consider whether we are not in the presence of death, real or mystical'. The buffoonery in this play—the buffoonery of the dead sheep in the cradle—once again (as in the First Towneley Shepherds' Play) indicates the presence of death and birth in their age-old association. There is probably no irreverence to the Christian religion intended. The mock-nativity does not appear to be introduced in the mocking spirit of scepticism. The boisterousness of the Mak farce as a whole, culminating in the tossing of Mak in a blanket, may rather be interpreted as an expression of the jollity of the folk as the re-birth significance of the mid-winter festival overcomes the death significance. As the consciousness of the distress of winter is absorbed into the boisterousness of the farce, so the latter in its turn is finally absorbed into the joyous wonder of the Adoration of the Shepherds. The movement of the dramatic poem is from the winter sorrow of the opening monologue, through the boisterous jollity of the Mak farce, into this final reverent joy and wonder. The Mak farce—including the mock-nativity—is thus not finally incongruous with the whole play as a Nativity Play, but indeed contributes to a total complex harmony. The boisterous jollity is resolved or transmuted into this more complete joy as the *Gloria in excelsis* is sung. We who read are apt not to allow for what would have been the effect of the singing.

Who is Mak, the sheep-stealer? Was he invented for this play, or did he have a previous existence in tradition? Is he more than he seems? There is a resemblance between Mak and that other rogue, Autolycus, in *A Winter's Tale* (allowing, of course, that the Shakespearean character is much more various, that he has been combined with, for example, the figure of the pedlar at the fair). We can, perhaps, find a clue to the underlying significance of the one by pondering the significance of the other in his context. Autolycus (like Mak) is a thief. At his first entrance he alludes to Mercury: 'My father named me Autolycus; who being, as I am, litter'd under Mercury, was likewise a snapper-up of unconsider'd trifles.'' But Mercury, besides being the patron of thieves, was also the go-between to and from the lower and upper worlds. As such, he conducts Proserpina, the spring-goddess, back to the upper world. Now it is precisely Autolycus who introduces the spring note into *A Winter's Tale* in the song which he enters singing—and he snatches away the linen bleaching on the hedges (surely the snow). He heralds or prepares the way for Perdita whose rôle in the shepherds' spring festival is that of the flower-girl or spring-goddess (it is no accident that she alludes to Proserpina). He is also, we may note, a shape

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shifter; at least he is continually disguising himself or assuming deceptive appearances for his professional purposes. If we agree that this Shakespearean character has a tradition behind him, he must as an English character have descended from a tradition other than the Greek or Roman and most probably the Celtic or Norse. Among the Norse gods, Loki was not only a shape shifter (like the Celtic sun-god Curoi) but dishonest, a ne'er-do-well and a thief. It is a fair guess that the grand original of Mak and of his wonderful Shakespearean counterpart, Autolycus, is none other than Loki. Loki is believed to have been fire and an associate (perhaps aspect) of the sun-god. But whoever was their original (or originals) it is improbable that either Mak or Autolycus was invented to meet the exigency of providing light comic relief; they have every appearance of being traditional figures which, in the case of Autolycus at least, a great poet has known how to make the most of in a specific dramatic-poetic context. 'The poets', says Hocart again, 'do not invent half so much as they are supposed to do, but rather turn ancient facts to poetic uses'.

Though Mak first enters to the accompaniment of the mirthful singing of the shepherds, the farce commences, on the part of Mak himself, on a note of distress that corresponds with that of the opening of the play.

Mak. Now wold God I were in heven for there wepe no barnes
So styll.

Primus pastor.
Who is that pypys so poore?

Mak. Wold God ye wyst how I foore!
Lo, a man that walkys on the moore,
And has not all his wyll!

Then he breaks into a fit of boasting and *flyting*, like the antagonists in the Mummers' Play or like Herod or Pilate elsewhere in the Mystery Cycle; he declares that he is a yeoman of the king and 'sond from a greatt lordyng'; but the shepherds recognize him and suspect him of being a thief. He is the wild man of the moor—'a man that walkys on the moore'—and also (in relation to the Christian part of the significance) perhaps the unregenerate Adam whom Christ is born to redeem. He would cheat his neighbours for the sake of a dinner for himself, his wife and his too numerous progeny. But he also suffers the common lot of poor men in winter, he also is hungry; he is as much the oppressed as he is the oppressor. Though he is a rogue, he is (like Autolycus) a merry rogue. He risks hanging; yet, perhaps because he provides merriment, the worst that actually happens in the end, when he is exposed, is that he is tossed in a blanket, as if it were a Christmas game—as indeed it *is*. Thus there is no tragedy to mar the good-humoured mirth of Christmas, and the element of jollity achieves a boisterous victory in the play. At the same time, though Mak is not actually hanged he *is* essentially the 'hanged man', as we have become familiar with him from the work

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of the anthropologists; for Mak in being tossed in the air undergoes what is essentially a mock death.

What drives Mak to sheep-stealing is, then, the hunger that in common with the shepherds he and his suffer in the winter.

> Bot a sekenes I feyll that haldys me full haytt,
> My belly farys not weyll it is out of astate.

He has more children than he can feed—though it seems that there is a fire in his hut.

> Primus pastor.
> How farys thi wyff? by my hoode how farys sho?
> Mak. Lyys walteryng, by the roode by the fyere, lo!
> And a howse full of brude she drynkys well to . . .
> And ilk yere that comys to man
> She bryngys furth a lakan,
> And som yeres two.

The shepherds are ill-clad and without a fire

> I am cold and nakyd and wold have a fyere.

Mak is something of a magician, for he pronounces a spell over them, when they lie down to sleep, in order to put them into a deeper sleep. There is an element of what we might call comic melodrama in his monologue as he draws a circle round them—a circle 'as rownde as a moyn'—and, while they are snoring, steals a fat sheep. There is a suggestion of Mak as the wolf stealing into the fold; later, indeed, it appears that one of the shepherds has dreamt that he saw him clad in wolf-skin.[5] There is rather more action and movement in this play than is usual in a cycle play.

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[5]'The strange kinship between sun and wolf', union and conflict, association and opposition, is examined by H. Flanders Dunbar in *Symbolism in Mediæval Thought*, in which she provides clear proof of Dante's use of the pagan system of religious symbolic language and imagery. 'Although there have been many guesses, no one knows exactly when or how there was established the strange kinship between sun and wolf, yet in regard to Zeus himself it has been argued as to whether in reality he was wolf-god or light-god. The very words are related etymologically, the word "wolf" with "light", and the word "wolf-skin" with "darkness". Firmly established as are the light associations of Zeus, Sir J. G. Frazer has said: "The connexion of Lycaean Zeus with wolves is too firmly established to allow us seriously to doubt that he is the wolf-god". Moreover, Zeus is not the only "Shining One" with whom there exists this close association with the wolf. Osiris, god of the sun, whose sign was Sirius the dogstar, was represented clad in a wolf-skin. It is unnecessary to give more examples, since the symbolisms of these two were fundamental in the forming of Dante's tradition; and whether or not he was aware of the facts, they had shaped the

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The monologue is followed by a dialogue between Mak and his wife, Gyll, as he arrives at the hut where (like Noah's wife and like the fairy women) she sits spinning. She is glad to see him (and the sheep) but she fears that sooner or later he will be hanged.

Mak. Good wyff, open the hek! seys thou not what I bryng?
Vxor. I may thole the dray the snek. A, com in, my swetyng!
Mak. Yee, thou thar not rek of my long standyng.
Vxor. By the nakyd nek art thou lyke for to hyng.
Mak. Do way:
I am worthy my mete,
For in a strate can I gett
More then thay that swynke and swette
All the long day.
Vxor. It were a fowll blott to be hanged for the case.
Mak. I have skapyd, Jelott oft as hard a glase.
Vxor. Bot so long goys the pott to the water, men says,
At last
Comys it home broken.
Com thay or he be slayn and here the shepe blete!
Mak. Then myght I be tane, that were a cold swette!
Go spar
The gaytt doore.
Vxor. Yis, Mak,
For and thay com at thy bak,
Mak. Then myght I by, for all the pak,
The dewill of the war.

It is she who devises the ruse of swaddling the sheep in the cradle. Mak has already returned to his place betwen the sleepers when they wake severally (*'Resurrex a mortuis!'* exclaims the First Shepherd awaking). Almost their first concern is as to the whereabouts of Mak whom, it is clear, they do not trust. Mak pretends to waken, with a stiff neck, after having dreamt that his wife has given birth to yet another boy.

Wo is hym has many barnes,
And thereto lytyll brede!

On Mak's second arrival back at his hut there is first a brief *flyting* outbreak between him and his wife.

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symbolisms that he found at hand. The wolf for Dante was in manifold association with the sun'.

One may have less hesitation in connecting Mak with Loki and the wolf when one reflects that Loki appears in the myths as a mischief-making *servant*, that the Norse end of the world begins with a wolf devouring the Sun, and that the monster Fenris-wolf who is then to vanquish Odin was conceived by Loki.

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Vxor. Why, who wanders, who wakys who commys, who gose?
Who brewys, who bakys? What makys me thus hose?
And than,
It is rewthe to beholde,
Now in hote, now in colde,
Full wofull is the householde
That wantys a woman.

They anticipate an awkward visit from the shepherds, who are meanwhile counting their sheep. Gyll puts the ruse of swaddling the sheep in the cradle into action. In the subsequent developments of the farce there are two 'discoveries' made by the shepherds, the first of the loss of a sheep, the second of the sheep in the cradle. The buffoonery of the sheep lost and found—found in a cradle—corresponds, at the farcical level, to the death-and-birth theme of the play as a whole. (At the highest and most serious level, the daughter lost and found in *A Winter's Tale, Pericles* and *Lear,* has a corresponding symbolical meaning.)

To the accompaniment of Mak singing a lullaby and Gyll groaning as in childbirth, the Three Shepherds arrive to seek their lost sheep.

Tertius pastor.
Will ye here how thay hak? oure syre, lyst, croyne.

Primus pastor.
Hard I never none crak so clere out of toyne;
Call on hym.

Secundus pastor. Mak! undo youre doore soyne.

Mak. Who is that spak, as it were noyne,
On loft?
Who is that I say?

Tertius pastor.
Goode felowse, were it day.

Mak. As far as ye may,
Good, spekys soft,
Over a seke woman's heede that is at mayll easse.

Mak welcomes them.

Mak. Ye have ryn in the myre and ar weytt yit:
I shall make you a fyre if ye will syt . . .
I have barnes, if ye knew,
Well mo then enewe,
Bot we must drynk as we brew,
And that is bot reson. . . .

Tertius pastor. Yee, oure shepe that we gett,
Ar stollyn as thay yode oure los is grette.

Mak. Syrs, drynkys!
Had I bene thore,
Som shuld have boght it full sore,

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Primus pastor.
Mary, som men trowes that ye wore
And that us forthynkys.

The irony throughout this scene—as when Gyll accuses the shepherds themselves of being thieves and protests she will eat the child in the cradle if ever she cheated them—clearly assumes an audience to appreciate it.

Vxor. I swelt!
Outt, thefys, fro my wonys!
Ye com to rob us for the nonys.
Mak. Here ye not how she gronys?
Youre hartys shuld melt.
Vxor. Outt, thefys, fro my barne!

All that the shepherds can find in Mak's cottage are 'bot two tome platers' that have plainly the significance in this play that, in the First Towneley Shepherds' Play, Slaw-pace's empty bag has.

Just when, at the departure of the shepherds, the suspense has relaxed and the audience has begun to draw breath again the shepherds return—a well-managed dramatic surprise—and make the discovery of the sheep in the cradle.

Primus pastor.
Gaf ye the chyld any thyng?
Secundus pastor.
I trow not oone farthyng.
Tertius pastor.
Fast agane will I flyng,
Abyde ye me there.
Mak, take it to no grefe if I com to thi barne.
Mak. Nay, thou dos me greatt reprefe and fowll has thou farne.
Tertius pastor.
The child will it not grefe that lytyll day starne.
Mak, with youre leyfe let me gyf youre barne,
Bot sex pence.
Mak. Nay, do way: he slepys.
Tertius pastor.
Me thynk he pepys.
Mak. When he wakyns he wepys.
I pray you go hence.
Tertius pastor.
Gyf me lefe hym to kys and lyft up the clowtt.
What the dewill is this? He has a long snowte.

Yet Gyll persists in maintaining that the sheep is not a sheep but her child—'A pratty child is he as syttys on a woman's kne'. In this

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mock nativity in which Gyll comically corresponds to, or pre-figures, Mary there is the suggestion, if not of a miraculous birth, at least of a supernatural occurrence; her child (Gyll claims) has been metamorphosed by an elf.

> He was takyn with an elfe,
> I saw it myself.
> When the clok stroke twelf
> Was he forshapyn.

The farce attains its climax with the tossing of Mak in the air—a death[6] in terms of buffoonery. The change or transformation in the play thereupon happens with the Angels' singing of the *Gloria in excelsis* and the Shepherds' wondering recognition that 'He spake of a barne'. They marvel that the new-born Saviour is 'poorly arayd' and comes 'to so poore as we ar'. He is the Saviour of all mankind—of the poor above all. Thus the note of the distresses of the poor in the opening of the play finds its response towards the close. The play concludes, as does the First Play, with the Adoration of the Shepherds. The natural human tenderness towards a child is expressed and is at the same time hallowed by the recognition that this child is God. The Three Shepherds approach each with a gift—a 'bob of cherys', a bird and a ball.

> Lo, he merys;
> Lo, he laghys, my swetyng,
> A welfare metyng,
> I have holden my hetyng;
> Have a bob of cherys. . . .
> Hayll! I kneyll and I cowre. A byrd have I broght
> To my barne.
> Hayll, lytyll tyne mop!
> Of oure crede thou art crop:
> I wold drynk on thy cop,
> Lytyll day starne. . . .
> Hayll! put furth thy dall!
> I bryng the bot a ball:
> Have and play the with all,
> And go to the tenys.

We should not jump to the conclusion that 'go to the tenys' is naïvety on the part of the shepherd, that he is unconscious of such a remark being incongruous to a new-born infant. On the contrary, it is surely intended as this shepherd's conscious humour. It has been far too easily assumed that everything in these plays is naïve.

JOHN SPEIRS.

(*To be concluded*)

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[6]Tertius pastor.
Syn thay manteyn thare theft let do thaym to dede.
Mak. If I trespas eft gyrd of my heede.

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'REASON' AND THE RESTORATION ETHOS

IN 1663, three years after the return of Charles to the throne, John Dryden published, as a tribute to his friend Dr. Charleton, an apostrophe to the Royal Society, of which Dryden was a new member. It is couched in interesting terms, *e.g.*:

> The longest tyranny that ever sway'd
> Was that wherein our ancestors betray'd
> Their free-born reason to the Stagirite,
> And made his torch their universal light.
> . . . . .
> Columbus was the first that shook his throne,
> And found a temp'rate in a torride zone,
> The fev'rish air fann'd by a cooling breeze,
> The fruitful vales set round with shady trees,
> And guiltless men, who danc'd away their time,
> Fresh as their groves and happy as their clime.

The Stagirite is, of course, Aristotle, and mankind's concession to his influence is described in terms of the Fall. Dryden's picture of the Tree of Knowledge is that it bore the tempting fruits of Aristotelian rationalism which has since cursed men by leading them into recesses of error, away from their naïve and untutored paradise. This paradise can only be regained by eschewing this order of temptation and following the example of Columbus, through whose work a world of pristine innocence was revealed. But we further see that Columbus is really here represented as the first scientist, and that directly in his line come all the members of the Royal Society:

> Among th' asserters of free reason's claim,
> Th' English are not the least in worth or fame.
> The world to Bacon does not only owe
> Its present knowledge, but its future too.

But what seems most noteworthy in Dryden's optimistic scourging of Aristotelianism is the figurative picture it presents——that of a temperate new world replacing the 'fev'rish air' and the couching of the opposition in the terminology of religion. Here we can do no better than look at Thomas Sprat's 1660 *History of the Royal Society* to make the connection explicit, and this document proves so useful that a full quotation forms a good background to this chapter:

> 'For such candid and unpassionate company as that was, and for such a gloomy season, what could have been a fitter subject to pitch upon than natural philosophy. To have been

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always tossing about some theological question would have been to have made that their private diversion the excess of which they themselves disliked in the public. To have been eternally musing on civil business and the distresses of their country was too melancholy a reflection. It was Nature alone which could pleasantly entertain them, in that estate. The contemplation of that draws our minds off from past or present misfortunes, and makes them conquerors over things in the greatest public unhappiness; while the consideration of men and human affairs may affect us with a thousand various disquiets, *that* never separates us into mortal factions; *that* gives us room to differ without animosity and permits us to raise contrary imaginations without any danger of a civil war . . . But (to make haste through those dreadful revolutions, which cannot be beheld on paper without horror), . . . the Royal Society had its beginning in the wonderful pacific year 1660. So that, if any conjectures of good fortune, from extraordinary nativities, hold true, we may presage all happiness to this undertaking. And I shall here join my solemn wishes that, as it began in that time when our country was freed from confusion and slavery, so it may, in its progress, redeem the minds of men from obscurity, uncertainty, and bondage. . . . They have attempted to free it (the knowledge of Nature) from the artifice, and humors, and passions of sects; to render it an instrument whereby mankind may obtain a dominion over things, and not only over one another's judgments. And lastly, they have begun to establish these reformations in philosophy, not so much by any solemnity of laws, or ostentation of ceremonies, as by solid practice and examples: not by a glorious pomp of words, but by the silent, effectual, and unanswerable arguments of real productions . . . If the ancients prescribed it as a sufficient remedy against such violent passions only to repeat the alphabet over, whereby there was leisure given to the mind to recover itself from any sudden fury, then how much more effectual medicines against the same distempers may be fetched from the whole alphabet of Nature which represents itself to our consideration in so many infinite volumes'.[3]

So, close behind the scene, and cited by Sprat as primary motive and justification for the founding of the Royal Society, and for the approach to life which he says the Society shall represent, is the but newly concluded régime of Cromwell and the Saints. Against this the theological phrasing of Dryden is clearly understandable. Two kinds of human activity are clearly distinguished, the one being disembodied speculative thinking and disputing, the other naïve empirical observation—the contrast of 'a glorious pomp of words' to 'the silent effectual, and unanswerable arguments of real productions.' The former is linked to the character of the

[3]Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society* (1667) Second Part, Sections II, III, V; Third Part, Section XIII.

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Puritan Revolution as the latter to the only safe way of counteracting it. Sprat amplifies this in Section XI of his History, where he charts the province of the Society's activities:

> 'In men may be considered the faculties and operations of their souls; the constitution of their bodies, and the works of their hands. Of these, the first they omit; both because the knowledge and the direction of them have been before undertaken, by some arts on which they have no mind to intrench as the Politics, Morality and Oratory,[4] and also because the reason, the understanding, the tempers, the will, the passions of men are so hard to be reduced to any certain observation of the senses; and afford so much room to the observers to falsify or counterfeit that, if such discourses should be at once entertained, they would be in danger of falling into *talking*, instead of *working*, which they carefully avoid'.[5]

Thus Sprat's quiet judgment modestly but firmly eschews Aristotelianism, the train of Scholasticism which at its highest was based on Aristotle, and abstract intellectualism in general. In its place he puts a sensory primitivism which resembles nothing so much, in his own description, as the concrete vision of the child:

> 'Whatsoever they feel, or see, will afford them observations . . . What room can there be for low and little things in a mind so usefully and successfully employed. What ambitious disquiets can torment that man who has so much glory before him, for which there are only required the delightful works of his hands? What dark or melancholy passions can overshadow his heart, whose senses are always full of so many various productions, of which the least progress and success will affect him with an innocent joy? What anger, envy, hatred, or revenge can long torment his breast, whom not only the greatest and noblest objects, but every sand, every pebble, every grass, every earth, every fly can divert? To whom the return of every season, every month, every day do suggest a circle of most pleasant operations'.[6]

This, then, is the character of what Dryden called 'freeborn' or 'free' reason, and it resembles not so much the idea of mental operations as it does their absolute contrary—the operations of the five senses under material stimulus at their simplest level. It is 'whatever they feel or see', not what they think, and it is their 'senses' which are always full of so many various productions. And this is to be the pill to purge state melancholy, the antidote to disputation, to theological and political confusion, to faction, revolution and civil war, to uncertainty and obscurity, to sectarianism, to ostentation.

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[4]This is surely implicit reference to Aristotle's *Politics, Nichomachean Ethics* and *Poetics*.
[5]*Ibid.*, Second Part, Section XI.
[6]*Ibid.*, Third Part, Section XIII.

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It is to brush away completely the glorious pomp of bodiless words, and put in their place the thing itself, the unanswerable argument. It is, in Dryden's phrase, to break 'the longest tyranny that ever sway'd' and return us to the prelapsarian bliss of 'guiltless men, who danc'd away their time, fresh as their groves and happy as their clime'. This collocation is revealing; it helps us to understand how this period produced side by side Mrs. Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and Locke's empirical *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. It casts a special light on Dryden's reverence for the "native sweetness, easiness and smoothness'[7] of Ovid—indeed, on all his many praises for 'harmony of numbers' in the literature of the Græco-Roman classical past. That ancient society has always represented a pristine golden age in the English mind, whether they yearned after the perfect or the broken column.

From another milieu than Dryden's comes the same conception of 'right reason'. Rochester was a courtier whose verse was serious but dilettante, while Dryden was a bourgeois journalist whose work was commercial and not guaranteed by seriousness—he wrote to earn money and reputation and to rise in the world. In this period of the decline of the monarchy and court, and the rise of the bourgeoisie, we find two such characters at loggerheads, but sharing an equal footing; each jealous of the other, neither in a secure position and each climbing in his own way toward the eternal goals of security and fame, for some stabilized status. The métier of this bloodless struggle was literature, and the vulgar scramble for success in terms of literary public and private approval was no less undignified and becoming to a courtier than it was pathetic in the cit who would be a gentleman. Rochester, who can always be counted on for a forthright statement, describes the relationship in his Allusion to the Tenth Satire of the First Book of Horace (1680):

> May I not have leave impartially
> To search and censure Dryden's works, and try
> If those gross faults his choice pen does commit
> Proceed from want of judgment or of wit;
> Or if his lumpish fancy does refuse
> Spirit and grace to his loose slattern muse?
> Five hundred verses ev'ry morning writ
> Proves you no more a poet than a wit:
> Such scribbling authors have been seen before:
> *Mustapha, Th' English Princess,* forty more,
> Were things perhaps composed in half an hour.
> To write what may securely stand the test
> Of being well read over thrice at least,
> Weigh ev'ry word, and ev'ry thought refine;

[7] John Dryden, *Examen Poeticum* (1693) printed in *Essays of John Dryden,* ed. W. P. Ker, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1900, Vol. II, p. 10. All subsequent references to Dryden's prose writings are to this edition.

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Scorn all applause the vile rout can bestow
And be content to please those few who know.

Rochester's jealousy is ill-concealed, and the 'few who know' strike us the same as the 'vile rout' who praise Dryden. At no other point in English literary history did literature become the terms and weapons of social struggle which it was in the Restoration.

As to Rochester's view of intellectualism, however, *The Satire Against Mankind* shows it to cut across the above antagonism and place Rochester in the same camp as Dryden and Sprat—which should be an indication of the fundamental nature of the issue, and its centrality in the Restoration ethos. Rochester inveighs against mankind because it

. . . before certain instinct will prefer
Reason, which fifty times for one does err—
Reason, an *ignis fatuus* of the mind,
Which leaves the light of Nature, sense, behind.
Pathless and dang'rous, wand'ring ways, it takes,
Through error's fenny bogs and thorny brakes:
Whilst the misguided foll'wer climbs with pain
Mountains of whimseys, heap'd in his own brain,
Stumbling from thought to thought, falls headlong down
Into Doubt's boundless sea, where like to drown,
Books bear it up awhile . . .

What category of living operations, then, does Rochester castigate under the heading of 'Reason'? He clarifies his term explicitly:

Reason, by whose aspiring influence,
We take a flight *beyond material sense,*
Dive into mysteries, then soaring pierce
The flaming limits of the universe,
Search Heav'n and Hell, find out what's acted there,
And give the world true grounds of hope and fear.

One recalls, almost by exact parallel of language, Sir Thomas Browne in *Religio Medici*:

I love to lose myself in a mystery, to pursue my reason to an O Alitudo!

But times have changed. Rochester's society is afraid of this *ignis fatuus* of the mind, afraid of its 'pathless, dang'rous, wand'ring ways', frightened lest 'stumbling from thought to thought' it 'falls headlong down into Doubt's boundless sea'. And that which had shaken Rochester's morale to this degree was the same which had shaken Sprat's—the Puritan Revolution. Those bogies against which Sprat had prescribed a childlike attention to material nature had been, in his own terms, excess of 'forever tossing about some theological question', 'mortal factions', 'danger of civil war', 'dreadful revolutions', 'confusion', 'uncertainty', 'the passions of sects'. Rochester's objection to the 'Reason' which he

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described above is cast in the same terms as Sprat's. (The passage follows on directly from 'hope and fear' above):

> Hold, mighty man, I cry: all this we knew,
> From the pathetic pen of Ingolo,
> From Patrick's Pilgrim, Sibb's Soliloquies,
> And 'tis this very reason I despise,
> This supernatural gift, that makes a mite
> Think he's the image of the infinite;
> Comparing his short life, void of all rest,
> To the eternal and the ever blest;
> This puzzling stirrer up of doubt,
> That frames deep mysteries, then finds 'em out.

'Patrick's Pilgrim' is a 1664 allegory by Bishop Simon Patrick, similar to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and 'Sibb's Soliloquies' are religious meditative treatises by Richard Sibbes (1577-1635), *e.g.*, *Divine Meditations and Holy Contemplations* (1638). So, Rochester, more explicitly than Sprat, connects intellectualism—that is, pursuit of reason in the abstract, as against sensory empiricism—with the character of the disastrous Revolution—indeed, this is to be expected, because his position was so much more extremely contingent upon the security of the Monarchy. And we should always remember that the restoration of Charles II in no way restored monarchy to any way near its former security—the difference cannot be over-emphasised.

If Rochester's idea and opinion of abstract reason as principle malefactor was then the same as Sprat's, and the social roots of this opinion—indeed, fear—were also the same, as being grounded in the Puritan movement and the Revolution, what positive recommendation did he make for the operation of the intelligence, in opposition to this intellectualism? We find that he makes, in substance, the same recommendation as Sprat—that of a turning to the sensory evidence of material observation and experience, uncomplicated by the manœuverings of purely mental or abstract processes. Here he finds the same simple and unanswerable security as Sprat emphasised. In the passages of Rochester quoted above, we can note this orientation. The Reason he condemns as *ignis fatuus* 'leaves the light of Nature, *sense*, behind'. Our error in using it is 'we take a flight *"beyond material sense"* ', and prefer Reason *'before certain instinct'*. Rochester's primitivism exceeds Sprat's:

> . . . thoughts were giv'n for action's government;
> Where action ceases, thought's impertinent.
> Our sphere of action is life's happiness,
> And he that thinks beyond, thinks like an ass.

This is Rochester's version of Sprat's 'inviolable correspondence between the hand and the brain', albeit a less civilized one, for Sprat's realization took the form of experimental study of Nature, while Rochester followed through his precept by sending out a gang of thugs to beat up Dryden in Rose Alley, thus carrying his dislike

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of his competitor to its logical conclusion according to this natural philosophy.

Just as Dryden put against the villain of neo-Aristotelian intellectualism, or abstract reason, the positive desirable term of 'free-born reason', which is simple natural observation, so Rochester provides us with a good and a bad breed. Against the Reason which he deplores, he puts the term 'right reason', which he extols in contrast. And it turns out to be not reason at all in the sense that we usually understand, but merely natural desires, instincts, and sensory evidence.

> Thus whilst against false reas'ning I inveigh,
> I own right reason, which I would obey;
> That reason, which distinguishes by sense,
> And gives us rules of good and ill from thence;
> That bounds desires with a reforming will,
> To keep them more in vigor, not to kill;
> Your reason hinders; mine helps to enjoy,
> Renewing appetites yours would destroy.
> My reason is my friend, yours is a cheat;
> Hunger calls out, my reason bids me eat;
> Perversely yours, your appetite does mock;
> This asks for food, that answers, What's a clock?
> This plain distinction, Sir, your doubt secures;
> 'Tis not true reason I despise, but yours.
> Thus I think reason righted: but for man,
> I'll ne'er recant, defend him if you can.

So we must be on our guard, in interpreting the writings of this period, to make always this 'plain distinction' between right or free-born reason, and its nefarious abstract namesake, since they are not only at opposite poles, but their schism represents the psychological and spiritual crisis of the age, as well as cutting deep into the political, social and artistic dilemmas. The latter category, of discredited Reason, is made to include, among so many other things, the anti-rational, since this too is speculative, bodiless, and not substantiated by tangible, measurable material proofs which vouch for it unanswerably. So it is relegated to the category of mental imaginings, of 'flight beyond material sense', and in such manner the term 'Reason' is forced into identity with its antonym. But this seemed unavoidable—like all periods of crisis, the Restoration had room for only two categories, and since material sensory observation must exclusively and in its pure state occupy one of these, all else must reconcile itself within the limbo of the other. Likewise Rochester makes mankind's misleading reason to include fancy and romance, on the grounds that they too are mere mental activity since they have no empirical basis in natural phenomenological fact. So, accompanying Patrick's religious allegory and Sibb's divine meditations, both of which relate to the Dissenting revolution, we have Reason's operations represented by the 'pathetic pen of Ingolo', whose religious romance 'Bentivolio and Urania'

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(1660) has been described by Sir Walter Raleigh as 'the lowest depth to which English romance-writing sank'. It is to counteract such writings that Sprat says the members of the Royal Society 'have endeavoured to separate the knowledge of Nature from the colours of rhetoric, the devices of fancy, or the delightful deceit of fables'. Here then, grouped under one term, pejoratively used, are the apparently diverse elements of Aristotelianism, intellectualism, Protestantism, occultism, romance, rhetoric and metaphor; grouped on the common ground that they are all the workings of mind separate from matter, are all complications of thought and disembodied cerebration without unequivocal empirical guarantee of validity. Even metaphor, perhaps the least likely to fit the definition, is regarded as a species of fancy, and its a=b relationship a questionable piece of ratiocination, and an unwarranted complication over the simple a=a of observable fact. And if we contrast all these complications of abstraction, unguaranteed, unstabilized, and blowing like the wind, with the Golden Age of simple sense with which we began, we may easily begin to see develop in the Restoration mind the idea of an unspoiled Eden in the security of the Old Monarchy, a snake in a broad-brimmed black hat coiled complexly around the tree of Reason, a Long Parliament of judging Saints whose penalty for transgression was to require the destruction of the sensory pleasures of this world and their replacement by the bodiless idea of bliss in the next, and finally a Paradise regained, only in a qualified way, by a fallen monarchy for whom there always lurked the threat of the original sin, and the damnation of extinction in civil war.

Looking at Samuel Butler's satiric commentaries on the Protestants enforces this connection of their character with that of the abstract. He describes the character of a Fifth Monarchy man:

> 'He fancies a Fifth Monarchy as the quintessence of all governments, *abstracted from all matter* and consisting wholly of revelations, visions and mysteries'.[9]

In *Hudibras* the same association is made; he describes the Presbyter Knight:

> He could reduce all things to acts,
> And knew their nature by abstracts
> Where entity and quiddity,
> The ghosts of defunct bodies fly;
> Where Truth in person does appear,
> Like words congeal'd in northern air'.[10]

Further reading of Butler shows, emerging under his disapproval, the same cluster of qualities which seemed to gather under the pejorative head of mental, as against natural, Reason, in the foregoing examination of Dryden, Sprat and Rochester. Butler has,

[9]Samuel Butler, *Characters*, (1759) 'A Fifth-Monarchy Man'.
[10]Butler, *Hudibras, Part I* (1663), Canto I, line 143.

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in the lines already quoted, grouped Protestantism and intellectualism or abstract thought. *Hudibras* furnishes several more examples in verification of this, *e.g.*:

> He was in Logic a great critic,
> Profoundly skill'd in Analytic.
> He'd run in debt by disputation,
> And pay with ratiocination.
> In Mathematics he was greater
> Than Tycho Brahe, or Erra Pater.[11]
> etc.

He has also included with these Aristotelian processes 'revelations, visions, and mysteries'.

> 'Nothing comes so near the Kingdom of Darkness as the Fifth Monarchy, that is nowhere to be found but in dark prophecies, obscure mythologies, and mystical riddles, like the visions Aeneas saw in Hell of the Roman Empire'.[12]

Thus the rational and the anti-rational jostle each other again in the same category, sharing only the common property of being non-material. He speaks of the Protestants' 'new light' in the same terms as those in which Rochester spoke of Reason, as:

> An *ignis fatuus* that bewitches,
> And leads men into pools and ditches.[13]

Occultism is explicitly included in the description of the Presbyter:

> For mystic learning, wondrous able
> In magic talisman and cabal,
> . . . . .
> Deep-sighted in intelligences,
> Ideas, atoms, influences;
> And much of *Terra Incognita*
> Th' intelligible world could say;
> A deep occult philosopher . . .[14]

And romance is included with the lot in the very form of *Hudibras*; it is cast on the model of *Don Quixote*, by which Cervantes ridiculed the whole tradition of Spanish chivalric romance. Butler extends his opinion of romance in his character of 'A Romance-Writer', where he says that

> 'He differs from a just historian as a joiner does from a carpenter; the one does things plainly and substantially for use, and the other carves and polishes merely for show and ornament'.[15]

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[11] *Ibid.*, lines 65, 77, 119.
[12] Butler, *Characters*, loc. cit.
[13] Butler, *Hudibras*, line 503.
[14] *Ibid.*, line 523.
[15] Butler, *Characters*, 'A Romance-Writer'.

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The 'plain and substantial' recalls Sprat's Royal Society 'reformations in philosophy, not so much by any solemnity of laws, or ostentation of ceremonies, as by solid practice and examples: not by a glorious pomp of words . . .'

And here Butler completes the picture, with reference to the Presbyter Knight:

> For Rhetoric, he could not ope
> His mouth but out there flew a trope.[16]

So far we have only duplicated in Butler the connections which we made through Dryden, Rochester and Sprat, with the additional verification that in Butler we have seen them all linked solidly to the character of the Fifth Monarchy man. This is an important verification, since we are dealing with the social conditions of philosophical, and resultantly of literary and linguistic, standards. It leaves us, in summary, with a delineation which places on one side abstract thought, complexity, mere speculation, and on the other empirical materialism, simplicity, sensory and sensual primitivism (Sprat—Rochester) plain language which is as close to deeds as possible, order and old-line monarchy. But Butler can take us further in clarifying the nature of the split between material and non-material, between sensory and mental. The situation which emerges, only at first glance paradoxical, is that these Restoration voices would not have been so violently raised against abstract thought if it had not, in the Puritans, taken so frighteningly material a form, nor would they have been so sincere in their espousal of the sensory, natural and empirical had they not found in it the abstract idea of order, which they had lost and sorely needed. After all the jesting at the abstract preoccupations of the Commonwealers, Butler's Presbyter Knight concludes by telling his squire:

> . . . now the field is not far off,
> Where we must give the world a proof
> Of deeds, not words, and such as suit
> Another manner of dispute.
> A controversy that affords
> Actions for arguments, not words.[17]

One passage verifies that the intrinsic nature of the Puritan cause, in Butler's mind, was associated with both complete abstractionism, and with complete lack of order.

> He had *First Mater* seen undrest:
> He took her naked, all alone,
> Before one rag of form was on.
> The Chaos, too, he had described,
> And soon quite through, or else he lied:
> Not that of pasteboard which men shew

[16]Butler, *Hudibras*, Canto I, line 81.
[17]*Ibid.*, line 859.

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For groats at Fair of Barthol'mew;
But its great grandsire, first o' th' name
Whence that and Reformation came:
Both cousin-gormans, and right able
T'inveigle and draw in the rabble.
But Reformation was, some say,
O' th' younger house to puppet-play.[18]

These last lines are useful in simplifying what might appear to be unconsidered complications, the question of differences between the dissenting sects themselves and what they respectively stood for. It is the whole Protestant dissenting movement to which these attributes of abstractness and chaos are being attached. As regards the reference to puppet-play at Bartholomew Fair, *Pepys' Diary* provides the proper historical gloss and sharpens the application. Pepys writes on September 7, 1661:

> 'And here was *Bartholomew Fair*, with the puppet-show, acted to-day, which had not been these forty years, it being so satirical against Puritanism, they durst not till now, which is strange they should already dare to do it, and the King to countenance it . . .'

The puppet-shows at the actual Bartholomew Fair usually represented scenes of biblical history, among which would be the creation of the world out of chaos, but clearly Butler is making the reference as well to the Ben Jonson play, lately produced with a revised puppet-show in which the Puritans were the puppet subjects, and this he satirically identifies, between the double reference Chaos and Puritanism. And however close this Puritanism might be associated with mental abstraction and a removal from the world of the senses, its Chaos took on a most tangible and material form. It was:

. . . that stubborn crew
Of errant saints, whom all men grant
To be the true church militant:
Such as do build their faith upon
The holy text of pike and gun;
Decide all controversies by
Infallible artillery;
And prove their doctrine orthodox
By apostolic blows and knocks;
Call fire, and sword, and desolation,
A *godly-thorough Reformation,*
Which always must be carried on,
And still be doing, never done:
As though religion were intended
For nothing else but to be mended.[19]

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[18] *Ibid.*, line 557.
[19] *Ibid.*, line 190.

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Though the first part of this, the 'fire and sword and desolation' was undoubtedly frighteningly spectacular and profoundly unsettling, and not to be under-estimated in the extent of its psychological aftermath, the two concluding couplets indicate a far more pervasive, if less dramatic, aspect of the destructive element. It is in this 'and still be doing, never done', that the real root of the disturbance lay—it represents the *progressive, dynamic* character of Puritanism. This movement grew gradually through the late Elizabethan and the first two Stuart monarchies, always gaining strength. It came briefly into open political control with the Interregnum, then retired behind the shallow façade of the restored monarchy, but continued to acquire power and substance, whatever the outward show of events. The weak monarchy, nothing like the *ancien régime*, never spectacularly fell again, it merely thinned out, mattered less and less, and finally was absorbed.

The reason that a progressive movement was seen as disturbing on a fundamental level is best brought out by a description of the static and ordered character of the existing structure against which it worked, and Professor Tawney, in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* affords such a description. He speaks of the form of society and religion, both in philosophical thought and institutional reality, during the Middle Ages, as the concept of 'the social organism':

> 'Society, like the human body, is an organism composed of different members. Each member has its function, prayer or defence, or merchandise or tilling the soil. Each must receive the means suited to its station, and must claim no more . . . The traditional, social philosophy was static, in the sense that it assumed a body of class relations sharply defined by custom and law, and little affected by the ebb and flow of economic movements . . . Intellectually, religious opinion endorsed to the full this static view, which regarded the social order as a thing unalterable'.[20]

Similarly Tawney shows this idea to extend through the Tudor reigns. He says:

> 'In economic and social, as in ecclesiastical, matters, the opening years of Elizabeth were a period of conservative reconstruction. The psychology of a nation which lives predominantly by the land is in sharp contrast with that of a commercial society. In the latter, when all goes well continuous expansion is taken for granted as the rule of life, new horizons are constantly opening, and the catchword of politics is the encouragement of enterprise. In the former the number of niches into which each successive generation must be fitted is strictly limited; movement means disturbance, for, as one man rises, another is thrust down; and the object of statesmen is, not to foster individual initiative, but

[20]R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1922), London, John Murray, 1929, pp. 22, 65, 56.

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to prevent social dislocation. It was in this mood that Tudor Privy Councils approached questions of social policy and industrial organization. Except when they were diverted by financial interests, or lured into ambitious, and usually unsuccessful projects for promoting economic development, their ideal was, not progress, but stability. Their enemies were disorder, and the restless appetites which, since they led to the encroachment of class on class, were thought to provoke it. Distrusting economic individualism for reasons of state, as heartily as did churchmen for reasons of religion, their aim was to crystalize existing class relationships by submitting them to pressure, at once restrictive and protective, of a paternal government, vigilant to detect all movements which menace the established order, and alert to suppress them.

> Take but degree away, untune that string,
> And, hark, what discord follows . . .' [21]

Speaking not only of the governing principles of the Tudors, but 'still more, of the first two Stuarts', however slipshod they may have been about putting them into practice, Tawney writes again:

> 'Its fundamental conception—the philosophy of the thinkers and the few statesmen who rose above immediate exigencies to consider the significance of the system in its totality—had a natural affinity with the doctrines which commended themselves to men of religion. It was of an ordered and graded society, in which each class performed its alloted function, and was secured such a livelihood, and no more than such a livelihood, as was proportioned to its status'.[22]

He would extend this concept of the 'ordered and graded' society, then, as the 'fundamental conception' right up to the time of the Civil War. However, even before the Stuart Government, something was happening to this 'social organism'. In 1642, the Puritans deposed the monarchy and took over in the name of their own religion, but for many decades before that the way for their triumph was being prepared, in terms, not of theology, but of pounds and shillings. The Tudor aristocracy was steadily and rapidly, both through its own mismanagement and the shrewd pressure of progressive enterprise, going bankrupt. And it was by and large to those who eventually wrested the government from them that they were irretrievably in debt.

A recent article by Lawrence Stone in the *Economic History Review*, entitled 'The Anatomy of the Elizabethan Aristocracy', documents this bankruptcy.[23] Meanwhile the rising merchant class was growing stronger and stronger by the process, and the money

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[21] *Ibid.*, p. 166.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 169.
[23] R. H. Tawney, 'The Rise of the Gentry', in *The Economic History Review*. Vol. XI, No. 1, 1941, p. 12.

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was pouring into their pockets. Stone says that nearly all of the nobility were in hopeless debt to mercers, and that clothing prices were fantastically high. This process, going on at an increasing rate of speed right up to the crash of 1642, represents the real breakdown of the monarchy, and the shift of the balance of power. Tawney records:

> 'A shrewd foreigner remarked, as he watched in the next century the headlong plunge downhill of the Crown finances, that the Stuarts were on the way to be overshadowed in wealth by their subjects before they were overthrown by them . . .'.[24]

and his article continues:

> 'When in 1642, all went into the melting-pot, the debts owed to the City by Royalists alone were put, in a financial memorandum, at not less than £2,000,000. Of the commercial magnates who, a few years later, scrambled for confiscated estates, not a few, as Dr. Chesney has shown, were creditors entering on properties long mortgaged to them. It was discovered, not for the last time, that as a method of foreclosure war was cheaper than litigation'.[25]

This then is the background to Butler's satirical identification of the Puritans with Chaos. As Tawney says:

> 'To a temper so permeated with the conception that society is an organism compact of diverse parts, and that the grand end of government is to maintain their co-operation, every social movement or personal motive which sets group against group, or individual against individual, appears, not the irrepressible energy of life, but the mutterings of chaos'.[26]

Both in the most theoretical and abstract aspect of their theological vision and in the very concrete qualities of their character as a rising social group, the Puritans exhibited a striking antithesis to the concept of static social organism. Unimpeded progress and success was essential, and one could not rest on one's laurels, or risk a slip. All through one's earthly pilgrimage reaffirmation was needed, since one's case was never finally proven. Nothing, I feel, is more indicative of the fundamentally *bourgeois* character of Puritanism than this placing of importance on appearances as the indication of one's status, and the necessity of putting up a show to the public in order to affirm one's 'blessedness'. I hope to point out in the next chapter how this attention to appearances and 'works' is displayed in the standards of Dryden's time and after. And the whole bourgeois commercial idea is, of course, to acquire more and more wealth, with no limit and no restrictions, to 'still be doing, never done'. The relationship between Puritanism and

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[24]*Ibid.*, p. 24.
[25]*Ibid.*, p. 12.
[26]Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, p. 171.

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commerce is not merely this one of resemblance, but actual identification of the social groups. Tawney makes the identification quite firmly, saying that 'Puritanism was the schoolmaster of the English middle classes[27] and speaking of 'the identification of the industrial and commercial classes with religious radicalism'.[28] He writes:

> 'The most conspicuous example was, of course, London, which had financed the Parliamentary forces, and which continued down to the Revolution to be *par excellence* 'the rebellious city', returning four Dissenters to the Royalist Parliament of 1661, etc. . . . The growth of Puritanism, wrote a hostile critic, was "by means of the City of London (the nest and seminary of seditious faction) and by reason of its universal trade throughout the kingdome, with its commodities conveying and deriving this civill contagion to all our cities and corporations, and thereby poysoning whole counties". In Lancashire the clothing towns—"the Genevas of Lancashire"—rose up like Puritan islands from the surrounding sea of Roman Catholicism. In Yorkshire, Bradford, Leeds and Halifax; in the midlands, Birmingham and Leicester; in the west, Gloucester, Taunton and Exeter, the capital of the west of England textile industry, were all centres of Puritanism.[29]

The seventeenth century Puritan observers bear out this alignment. Baxter wrote that:

> 'Most of the tenants of these gentlemen, and also most of the poorest of the people, whom the other call the Rabble, did follow the gentry, and were for the King'.[30]

These were not, then, of nature or conviction either Puritan or bourgeois, and Puritanism had to 'inveigle and draw in the rabble' if it needed support in numbers, as Butler testifies—their interests were not naturally identified with the radical movement, as they are in twentieth century 'communism'.

> ' "The King's cause and party", wrote one who described the situation in Bristol in 1645, "were favoured by two extremes in that city; the one, the wealthy and powerful men, the other, of the basest and lowest sort; but disgusted by the middle rank, the true and best citizens".'[31]

The Puritan temper, then, was that of these 'true and best citizens'. As Tawney says:

> 'This temper, of course with infinite varieties of quality and emphasis, found its social organ in those middle and commercial classes who were the citadel of the Puritan spirit, and whom

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 211.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 204.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 203.
[30] Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, 1696, p. 30.
[31] Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, p. 202.

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"ennobled by their industry and virtue" Milton (*in 1650*) described as the standard bearers of progress and enlightenment'.[32]

This commercial orientation of Puritanism runs through its whole canon of faith and ethics, sanctifying the economic virtues.[33] The Calvinists, says Tawney:

> 'Addressed their teaching primarily to the classes engaged in trade and industry, who formed the most modern and progressive elements in the life of the age. In so doing they naturally started from a frank recognition of the necessity of capital, credit and banking, large-scale commerce and finance, and the other practical facts of business life'.[34]

When Bunyan says:

> 'At the day of Doom men shall be judged according to their fruits. It will not be said then, Did you believe? but Were you doers, or talkers only? '[35]

he is expressing the spirit that is satirized in Hudibras' final speech about giving 'the world a proof of deeds, not words', and replacing 'actions for argument, not words', and his unsuccessful spurring of the horse. It is small wonder that Sprat and the others thought it was time for an active progress of *working* and not *talking* as well if they hoped to oppose in any way the tide of faction, chaos, and all that the rising Puritanism represented. But the type of victory sought after by Sprat in his recommendations is not a physical one, as of halting the march of the Puritan or commercial group. It is, rather, a quite *abstract* hope—that of restoring the *qualities* which the advance of this group had destroyed or weakened—the idea (a) of order, fixed form or structure, and (b) of sensory rather than mental intelligence. The former is, of course, violated by the progressive dynamic nature of both Puritan theology and bourgeois commercial enterprise, as indicated above. The latter is opposed on the theological side by the ascetic and other-worldly faith of the Puritans, and on the commercial side by the mental science of statistics, finance, and Political Arithmetic—a large scale investment, paper-work profit and loss, and banking replacing tangible trade—its unphysical and sometimes even illusory nature represented well by the eventual scandal of the South Sea Bubble.[36] The way in which the two work hand in hand, complementing and reinforcing one another, presents one of the trickiest problems for retrospective 'causal analysis, and I shall not even attempt it, but simply use the correlation as historical fact. Tawney says of it:

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[32]*Ibid.*, p. 231.

[33]The suspicion of economic motives had been one of the earliest elements in the social teaching of the Church, and was to survive till Calvinism endowed the life of economic enterprise with a new sanctification'. Tawney, *ibid.*, p. 34.

[34]*Ibid.*, p. 104.

[35]John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), London, Faber and Faber, 1947, p. 85.

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'Puritanism had its own standards of social conduct, derived partly from the obvious interests of the commercial classes, partly from its conception of the nature of God and the destiny of man. These standards were in sharp antithesis, both to the considerable surviving elements of feudalism in English society, and to the policy of the authoritarian State with its ideal of an ordered and graded society, whose different members were to be maintained in their traditional status by the pressure and protection of a paternal monarchy. Sapping the former by its influence and overthrowing the latter by direct attack, Puritanism became a potent force in preparing the way for the commercial civilization which was finally to triumph at the Revolution'.[37]

If he does attempt any causal sequence to explain this relationship it seems to be that of the economic change producing the religious. He writes:

'A society of peasants could be homogeneous in its religion, as it was already homogeneous in the simple uniformity of its economic arrangements. A many-sided business community could escape friction and obstruction only if it were free to absorb elements drawn from a multitude of different sources,[38] and if each of those elements were free to pursue its own way of life, and—in that age the same thing—to practise its own religion.[39]

On the other hand, in a later passage, he would seem to reverse this sequence, and represent the individualistic religion as 'the garrison' which was invaded by, and found an affinity with rather than a threat from, the rising commercial class of business enterprise:

'The transition from the anabaptist to the company promoter was less abrupt than might at first sight be supposed. It had been prepared, however unintentionally, by Puritan moralists. In their emphasis on the moral duty of untiring activity, on work as an end in itself, on the evils of luxury and extravagance, on fore-

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[36]'In a similar way we must take note of the foundation of such things as the Bank of England and the national debt—a new world of finance that alters not merely the government but the very fabric of the body politic'. Butterfield, *Origins of Modern Science*, p. 170.

[37]Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, p. 232.

[38]Dryden, whose beginnings were Puritan and whose ends were Roman Catholic, and whose social and literary double standard make him a fine microcosm of his period (see Chapter II) shows his affiliations with his bourgeois world in such statements as:

'Mutual borrowing, and commerce, makes the common riches of learning, as it does of the civil government'.

A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire, ed. Ker, Vol. II, p. 26.

[39]Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, p. 205.

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> sight and thrift, on moderation and self-discipline, and rational calculation, they had created an ideal of Christian conduct, which canonized as an ethical principle the efficiency which economic theorists were preaching as a specific for social disorders. . . . The garrison had discovered that the invading host of economic appetites was, not an enemy, but an ally.'[40]

For our purposes, the complex question of causal relationship need not be solved—it is perhaps wisest here to regard the two elements as two concomitant fruits on the same tree, which bore many other fruits as well, and had its roots deep in the European Renaissance. The fact that we are interested to establish is, rather, that there was a change, in both religious and secular spheres, from a static order to a state of dynamic flux and progressive movement, focussed in the Restoration period.

It may be objected here that this focus is too late—that the real change came with the Reformation, not with the Civil War, and that Calvin was a sixteenth-century fact. Butler himself has voiced such an attitude in the lines already quoted:

> 'But Reformation was, some say,
> O' th' younger house to puppet play'.

It would be, of course, absurd to regard Puritanism as something which suddenly sprang forth full-blown shortly before the Civil War—in fact, its obvious growth under Elizabeth and the early Stuarts does much, as I hope to demonstrate later, to explain some central aspects of the poetry of Shakespeare and the so-called 'metaphysical' school of the early seventeenth century. To be sure, we must go back at least to Luther. In this Professor Tawney is in accord. Writing of Luther's doctrine, he says:

> 'It was nothing less than the Reformation itself. For carried, as it was not carried by Luther, to its logical result, the argument made, not only good works, but sacraments and the Church itself unnecessary. The question of the religious significance of that change in emphasis, and of the validity of the intellectual processes by which Luther reached his conclusions, is one for theologians. Its effects on social theory were staggering. Since salvation is bestowed by the operation of grace in the heart, and by that alone, the whole fabric of organized religion, which had mediated between the individual soul and its Maker—divinely commissioned hierarchy, systematized activities, corporate institutions—drops away, as the blasphemous trivialities of a religion of works. The medieval conception of social order, which had regarded it as a highly articulated organism of members contributing in their different degrees to a spiritual purpose, was shattered, and differences which had been distinctions within a larger unity were now set in irreconcilable antagonism to each other. Grace no longer completed nature—it was the antithesis of it.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 248.

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Man's actions as a member of society were no longer the extension of his life as a child of God: they were its negation. Secular interests ceased to possess, even remotely, a religious significance: they might compete with religion, but they could not enrich it. Detailed rules of conduct—a Christian casuistry—are needless or objectionable: the Christian has a sufficient guide in the Bible and in his own conscience. In one sense, the distinction between the secular and the religious life has vanished. Monasticism was, so to speak, secularized; all men stood henceforward on the same footing towards God; and that advance, which contained the germ of all subsequent revolutions, was so enormous that all else seems insignificant. In another sense, the distinction became more profound that ever before. For, though all might be sanctified, it was their inner life alone that could partake of this sanctification. The world was divided into good and evil, light and darkness, spirit and matter. The division between them was absolute; no human effort could span the chasm.

'Thus the bridges between the worlds of spirit and of sense are broken, and the soul is isolated from the society of men, that it may enter into communion with its Maker'.[41]

This last central implication of early Lutheranism, the unbreachable divorce between 'spirit' and 'matter', is a key point to remember. It carries on directly in Calvinism, unimpaired by the Calvinists' urban and commercial compromise, to exert a potent force in the prevailing psychology of the Restoration. It is strongly reinforced by the seventeenth-century influence in England of Descartes—a coincidence which is far from accidental.

HAROLD WENDELL SMITH.

CORRESPONDENCE:

LAWRENCE AND ELIOT

Dear Sir,

It is always a pleasure to see genius defended against the Philistines, and though the airy incompetence of a Mr. Aldington hardly deserves such spirit, Lawrence certainly has an energetic champion in Mr. Leavis. But when Mr. Leavis persists—as he has down through the years—in drawing T. S. Eliot into the crowd of the blind, persists in assuming that Mr. Eliot (and everyone else who will not accept Lawrence) is guilty of prejudice, snobbery and immorality—it is time to protest. If Mr. Leavis can write that Mr. Eliot's observations 'are ill-calculated to remove the preconceptions and obtusenesses that have prevented Lawrence's work from being seen for what it is' (as if it must be Mr. Eliot's intention primarily to defend Lawrence), he obviously does not see that work as it really is, or at least is ill-equipped to grasp the absolute moral

[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 96-98.

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gap which separates Mr. Eliot from Lawrence. A good deal more than the candour Mr. Leavis asks for would be required to bridge that gap.

It is not my purpose to defend Mr. Eliot's religious beliefs, nor am I even particularly interested here in discussing Lawrence's merits as a creative artist. I wish merely to question the inference that a genuine understanding of Mr. Leavis' much-maligned favourite would inexorably draw all men of good will on to the Laurentian bandwagon; I wish to point out that such a notion displays a shocking ignorance of, or, at best, indifference to, an attitude towards life which has managed to survive in the Western world for about 2500 years. I do not question the sincerity of Mr. Leavis' views, or his right to reject that attitude; but I think he might occasionally pay his critical respects to an opposition that is somewhat more formidable than Mr. Aldington or even Mr. Eliot himself.

Mr. Leavis' summary of Lawrence's key doctrine seems a fair one:

> 'We are committed, he insists, to consciousness and self-responsibility. The mind—mental consciousness—has its essential part in the prosperous functioning of the psyche [I must note that Lawrence was not often so generous in his acceptance of consciousness]; but it cannot with its will-enforced ideas or ideals, command the sources of life, though it can thwart them. The power of recognizing justly the relation of idea and will to spontaneous life, of using the conscious mind for the attainment of "spontaneous-creative fulness of being", is intelligence'.

Since Mr. Leavis seems to feel that these are unquestionable truths, that no sane, unprejudiced mind could challenge the 'complete convincingness' of Lawrence's argument, let me, without further ado, put alongside this the following passage from the last book of Aristotle's *Ethics*:

> 'But that perfect happiness is a contemplative activity will appear from the following consideration as well. We assume the gods to be above all other things blessed and happy; but what sort of actions must we assign to them? Acts of justice? Will not the gods seem absurd if they make contracts and return deposits, and so on . . . If we were to run through them all, the circumstances of action would be found trivial and unworthy of gods. Still, every one supposes that they *live* and therefore that they are active; we cannot suppose them to sleep like Endymion. Now if you take away from a living being action, and still more production, what is left but contemplation; and of human activities, therefore, that which is most akin to this must be most of the nature of happiness'. (Bk. x: Ch. 8.)

I apologize for quoting at length from a familiar text, but a return to first principles is often refreshing and, in this case, mandatory. My point is that in this passage can be found the reason for objections that Mr. Eliot and others, apart from all questions

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of religious belief or snobbery, raise in regard to Lawrence. Aristotle is describing the way of life that is the spiritual cornerstone of our Greco-Christian heritage. It is a way that places contemplation above action, or, in Laurentian terms, consciousness above the 'sources of life'. The noblest function of those sources is to provide raw material to be given shape and colour (the shape and colour, that is, of Lawrence's hated 'ideas or ideals') in the light of consciousness. The good life is not earned by subordinating consciousness to 'spontaneous-creative fulness of being'; for 'fulness of being' means consciousness at its most brilliant; it means those few, precious moments when the essential disorder of life seems to find a pattern and be rolled—'even as a wheel that moveth equally'—before the mind's eye; it means the life of the spirit. All this, as Mr. Leavis is no doubt aware, may be found in *Four Quartets*. It is, I repeat, a tradition to be respected.

I need not go into the revolt against this tradition in modern times, except to remark that Lawrence would appear to come at the climax of that revolt. It is certainly true that Lawrence and his predecessors supplied a corrective to an over-spiritualization of nature. To call the attention of a healthy mind to the natural sources of our being is salutary; the life of consciousness cannot be lived without the life of the psyche, and it is well to know of the diversity of forms that may be wrought for contemplation. But it is another matter when nature is valued for itself alone, when a Lawrence can admonish us to seek the good life *beneath* the level of consciousness, in the 'phallic unconscious'. It is in this moral demand that Lawrence exhibits that revulsion against the strain of consciousness characteristic of an age weary of its human commitments, an age seeking protection and loss of identity in a reversion to animal impulses. It is a morality given its clearest utterance in the philosophy of Henri Bergson. Bergson, however, who was a good deal less ignorant (in Mr. Eliot's sense) than Lawrence, knew where he stood; and I commend to Mr. Leavis' attention the last pages of *Creative Evolution*. There Bergson passes judgment on his predecessors, and Mr. Leavis will discover that good Laurentians must, to maintain a consistent position, do without the central teachings of Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz and Spinoza—not to mention the dominant religions of West and East.

Of course Lawrence was a literary man not a philosopher, and it would require a separate essay to demonstrate how his art is corrupted by his beliefs. Mr. Leavis would object strenuously to this, no doubt, and inform us that it is *our* corruption and insensitivity that come between us and Lawrence; but what, we wonder, would he make of the following passage from *Women in Love*, a passage which clearly defines the inner drive that makes a Lawrence novel so repellent to some readers? Ursula has just checked Birkin's advances, and the latter, Lawrence tells us,

> 'was glad to be checked, rebuked, held back. For to desire is better than to possess, the finality of the end was dreaded as deeply as it was desired'.

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'For to desire is better than to possess'—perhaps this is the acme of good health to Mr. Leavis, but to some of us it is an abomination, a wilful despoiling of mankind's ideal possibilities.[1] If Mr. Leavis enjoys this sort of thing he should understand that there are those who cannot, and they hardly deserve to be accused of blunt stupidity and bad faith. To attack Mr. Eliot personally for his opinions is not only in poor taste; it is poor criticism, for it misses the fundamental disagreement between Lawrence and Mr. Eliot. When the latter objects to Lawrence he does so as the representative of a tradition that, as I hope I have suggested, has a fairly reputable ancestry. It may be out of fashion to-day, but now and then it manages to peep through and remind us of what is valuable in life. So long as a poet such as Yeats can write:

> Cast a cold eye
> On life, on death.
> Horseman, pass by.

we still have a chance. Incidentally, Yeats, whose wisdom and sense of reality Lawrence never approached, has the final word on his contemporary. It is all the more convincing in that Lawrence's fiction always gave Yeats a great deal of pleasure:

> 'Of course Lawrence is an emphasis directed against modern abstraction. I find the whole book [*Lady Chatterley's Lover*] interesting and not merely the sexual parts—they are something that he sets up as against the abstraction of an age that he thinks dead from the waist downward. Of course happiness is not where he seems to place it. We are happy when for everything inside us there is an equivalent something outside.[2]

Happiness is not where he seems to place it. Well, Lawrence thought it was, and *that* is the issue Mr. Leavis must face. It is time that he did so.

ROBERT D. WAGNER.
NEW YORK.

The attitudes towards Mr. Eliot and towards Lawrence that Mr. Wagner attacks are not mine, and in attributing them to me he ignores all that I have written. I have never suggested that Mr. Eliot—or anyone—ought to 'accept' Lawrence. Indeed, I have explicitly contended that to think of Lawrence in terms of 'accepting' or not 'accepting' is to be obtuse about the nature of his genius. Mr. Wagner, in the opening of his second paragraph, very coolly says that he is 'not particularly interested in discussing Lawrence's merits as a creative artist'. But that Lawrence *is* a creative artist, and a great one, has been the positive theme of all my own discussion of his work and its critics.

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[1]It is certainly true that on the level of Birkin and Ursula, it *is* better to desire than to possess. The point is, however, that Lawrence recognizes no higher level of possession than this, no transformation of desire into love—and certainly no Platonic love or charity.
[2]A. N. Jeffares, *W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet*, p. 281.

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For the judgment that he is a great artist I have been at pains to set forth my grounds. The very issue of *Scrutiny* that contains the review to which Mr. Wagner objects contains also the third part of an extended examination of *Women in Love* in which I explain in detail why I think that novel a work of original creative genius.

To contend that a writer is a great creative artist, and further, as I have done, that he shows an intelligence of rare grasp as well as fineness (something more, that is, than a capacity for penetrating but fitful insight) is not to contend that he may not be open to philosophical, moral or theological criticism. But such criticism, if it is to be relevant and profitable, will require more effort and humility than intellectuals of philosophical bent or training commonly suppose. Mr. Wagner seems half to promise us an essay demonstrating how Lawrence's art is corrupted by his beliefs. Far from objecting to such an enterprise. I hope that Mr. Wagner will carry it out. I shall read his essay with great interest, but I will not pretend that I expect to be convinced by it: Mr. Wagner, while so confident that he knows what Lawrence's beliefs are, seems so utterly unaware of the nature of Lawrence's art, or of the conditions of any relevant criticism on moral or philosophical grounds of any work of art.

The simple way in which, in his letter, he identifies Lawrence with the proposition that 'to desire is better than to possess' is revealing. He does it by adducing, from *Women in Love*, the dramatic presentation (dramatic in a mode proper to a novelist's technique) of a moment in the life of one of the characters. And it seems to me perhaps even more revealing that he can so confidently represent Lawrence as admonishing us to 'seek the good life *beneath* the level of consciousness, in the "phallic unconscious" '). To have been so utterly routed by *Women in Love* (which Mr. Wagner *has*, I gather, in some sense read) is to have refused the effort of thought demanded in an intelligent reading.

It is Mr. Wagner's education that resists, and makes him refuse to be drawn into any thinking of an unfamiliar kind—any real thinking, I am inclined to say, for it seems to me that the making of unfamiliar efforts and unfamiliar movements is a part of all real thinking. The trouble is that he not only knows beforehand what Lawrence's burden must be if it is to be conveniently placed and dismissed; he knows what thinking is and must be. The satisfaction he takes in producing his passage from Aristotle and laying down his large generalities about 'our Greco-Christian heritage' is significant. He obviously supposes that, challenged in such terms, I shall inevitably find myself committed to taking issue with him. But I am not in the least moved to take issue over that quotation or those generalities. Mr. Wagner's ability to suppose otherwise, or to suppose that he is promoting profitable discussion or clear thinking, goes with his inability to suspect that his confidently offered epitomes give us, not Lawrence or anything like him, but Mr. Wagner.

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For a critic of Lawrence (or an appraiser of Mr. Eliot), Mr. Wagner's notion of thinking is too limited and too simple-minded. After reading (apparently) *Women in Love* he can ignore the whole subtle process of definition (a remarkable work of intelligence) by which 'ideas' and 'ideals' are given the force they have in Lawrence's thought. This force cannot be taken by a reader who fails to notice how inseparably, in that process, 'ideas' and 'ideals' are associated with 'mental consciousness', and what intimate relations 'mental consciousness', as Lawrence's art defines it, has with 'will'. But for Mr. Wagner consciousness is consciousness; we all know what *that* is, he feels; and he supposes himself to be meeting Lawrence in a head-on rebuttal, and confounding me, when he tells us:

> 'The noblest function of those sources is to provide raw material to be given shape and colour (the shape and colour, that is, of Lawrence's (hated "ideas" and "ideals") in the light of consciousness. The good life is not earned by subordinating consciousness to "spontaneous-creative fulness of being" '—do we not all know what spontaneity is?—'for "fulness of being" means consciousness at its most brilliant . . .'

Mr. Wagner is entitled to his own views, and perhaps he could, in his own mode of dialectic, give the phrase, 'consciousness at its most brilliant' a context that would make it more than a mere phrase (though he seems not to suspect the need for that, and his present performance does not constitute a presumption in his favour). But he is not entitled to flatter himself that he has disposed of Lawrence when he has not begun to attend to him and shows instead a deep and resolute will *not* to attend to him.

He refers to what, I am 'no doubt aware' (he says), may be found in *Four Quartets*. What I find in *Four Quartets* is confirmation of my belief that a creative writer as such may have something to teach a philosopher (who will probably not notice) about thinking. I have said elsewhere[1] that *Burnt Norton* seems to me 'to do, by strictly poetical means, the business of an epistemological and metaphysical inquiry' and given my reasons for judging of *Four Quartets* as a whole that 'to have gone seriously into the poetry is to have had a quickening insight into the nature of thought and language; a discipline of intelligence and sensibility calculated to promote, if any could, real vitality and precision of thought'. Mr. Wagner forces me to observe that, whatever he himself found in *Four Quartets*, it was clearly no such discipline. And, though he comes to the defence of Mr. Eliot, it is impossible to suppose that he is more closely interested in T. S. Eliot's genius than in D. H. Lawrence's. For to appreciate the genius manifested in *Four Quartets* is—must one not believe?—to be unable to get the satisfaction out of Mr. Wagner's use of words that Mr. Wagner shows himself to be getting.

I have never contended—I am (as I have always been) far from contending—that Lawrence is not open to criticism. And I can

[1] *Education and the University*.

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imagine that a philosophically trained critic might criticize him cogently and helpfully, arguing (say) that the beliefs and valuations radical to his creative work are not wholly consistent with one another or that they exhibit a serious incompleteness, since they commit him, though there is no corresponding recognition in the attitudes conveyed by his art, to something further. But Mr. Wagner has not criticized Lawrence; he has ignored him; and *my* criticism of Mr. Eliot has not been that *he* has refused to 'accept' Lawrence, but that, in a world only too ready to take the cue, he has made defamatory play with something that his own preconceptions and prejudices have substituted for Lawrence. If Mr. Wagner is acquainted with the documents he will know that Mr. Eliot's attitude towards Lawrence has undergone marked changes, and that his present attitude (that expressed in the Foreword to Fr. Tiverton's book) constitutes an implicit admission of the justice of the sentence I have just written, I would much rather have left the deplorable past unrecalled, but what I judged to be a certain lack of frankness in Mr. Eliot's Foreword—at bottom, I think, a lack of frankness with himself—compelled me to an indignant note.

Coming again on the old charge of 'ignorance' I could not help recalling the terms in which, in *After Strange Gods*, Mr. Eliot explains what he means by it. In particular I recalled the passage in which Mr. Eliot takes Lawrence as an example of 'the crippling effect upon men of letters of not having been brought up in the environment of a living and central tradition'. This from the author of *The Cocktail Party !* Mr. Wagner, no doubt, being able to find in that play grounds for being confident that the author holds sound views about 'an attitude towards life which has managed to survive in the Western world for about 2500 years', cannot see the point of my exclamation. But the reading of a creative work, the taking of its significance, is a subtler affair than Mr. Wagner assumes. 'Never trust the artist, trust the tale' : to read *The Cocktail Party* in the spirit of Lawrence's maxim must, I think, be to marvel at the 'ignorance' that can let the author suppose that he is in a position to bring *that* charge against Lawrence. Mr. Wagner no doubt takes at its face-value the offered preoccupation of the play with 'the life of the spirit'. That preoccupation I judge to be essentially equivocal, and the play to be, in effect, a self-deceiving apologia for an ordinary 'social' worldliness—for the relation to the spiritual values that is characteristic of (say) the modish literary world. And into this defeat by the play (the 'tale') the artist seems to me to have been betrayed by his radically rejecting attitudes towards life; for these, as conveyed by the play, express so contemptuous a valuation that I cannot (in my own ignorance) help wondering what a theologically qualified critic—one who *was* a critic—would say about their consonance with central Christian dogma. What I judge with complete conviction is that *The Cocktail Party* exposes a poverty of experience, a lack of that knowledge of life which is only to be got by living, which makes the ability of the author to pronounce as he does on Lawrence a matter for ironical contemplation.

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I have in the past expressed my astonishment that so distinguished a mind as Mr. Eliot's should be able to hold up Irving Babbitt as a positive foil to Lawrence. This astonishment, I deduce, is not easily intelligible to Mr. Wagner, who is more easily satisfied than I am with philosophical attitudes and general propositions. It is with an earnest desire to cause as little offence as possible that I find myself having to observe that Mr. Eliot's invocation of Irving Babbitt as a criterion for the placing of Lawrence comes from a fellow-countryman of Ezra Pound.

Mr. Eliot has an immensely subtler mind than Pound, an immensely finer cultivation, and immensely greater poetic gifts, but he is clearly affected, as a critic of life and civilization, by certain of the disabilities that, in reviewing the *Letters*, I recently pointed to in Pound. Mr. Eliot could never have pronounced that 'The Greek populace was PAID to attend the great Greek tragedies, and darn well wouldn't have gone otherwise, or if there had been a cinema', and 'the Elizabethan drama, as distinct from the long defunct religious plays, was a court affair', but—in spite of the wealth of evidence conveyed by creative art in Lawrence's work—he cannot really believe that a miner's son, growing to manhood in a working-class family, can have been 'brought up in a living and central tradition', or is reasonably judged to have been when compared with Irving Babbitt, the distinctively academic intellectual whose intellectuality suggests the direct opposite of such an advantage. By way of making the point as clearly and as unpresumptuously as possible I remarked that I made it as a fellow-countryman of Lawrence; but all it amounts to for Mr. Wagner is that I call Mr. Eliot a snob (which is what Mr. Eliot actually, in *After Strange Gods*, calls Lawrence).

To establish that Lawrence did derive from his upbringing just that kind of strength which Mr. Eliot denies him I should not quote general propositions or explicit statements of attitude, or take up any such challenges as Mr. Wagner throws down when he exhorts me to read Bergson. I should point to the valuations and beliefs and radical attitudes towards life that are conveyed in Lawrence's art. These are such that the explicit traditional *wisdom* (to take up the term that Mr. Wagner can so astonishingly—to me—associate with Yeats) of *Apropos of Lady Chatterley's Lover* should strike no one as an incongruous or novel presence in the Laurentian *oeuvre*. I exhort Mr. Wagner (in return for *his* tip) to read what Lawrence, in that too little-known pamphlet, lightly but finally placing the cheap and noxious Shavian irreverence, says about sex, marriage, the Church and the family.

And perhaps if Mr. Wagner looks again at his own letter and my review he may detect something in himself—some significant predisposition, emotional and wilful. How else, for instance, can he explain his insinuation that I devote my review, or any considerable part of it, to making game of Mr. Aldington's book? Out of about three hundred and sixty lines, I give to that book in the merest perfunctory duty-reference just a dozen.

F. R. LEAVIS.

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'TROILUS AND CRESSIDA' AGAIN

I FEEL that yet another re-handling of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* calls for some apology. There is no need now—as there was twenty or thirty years ago—to rescue the play from the comparative obscurity in which only professional Shakespeareans grope their way, and to re-present it to the general reader. Indeed during the period between the wars it enjoyed something like a fashionable popularity in intellectual circles. And—what is more important—it has recently been the subject of some admirable criticism: I think especially of the essay by Wilson Knight in *The Wheel of Fire*—to which most subsequent commentators are indebted—an essay by D. A. Traversi in *Scrutiny* (VII, 3, December, 1938), and the pages devoted to the play by Henri Fluchère in his *Shakespeare, Dramaturge Elisabéthain*. After studies as intelligent as these it might seem best to leave the reader alone with a play that is not, after all, virtually inexhaustible like *King Lear*. My reason for returning to the play is that it has a position of considerable importance in the Shakespearean progress, in what, for want of a better term, we call the development of Shakespeare's thought, and I think that its significance in this respect is capable of some further elucidation.

The Shakespeare of early maturity—the Shakespeare newly emerged from the apprentice period of *Henry VI* and *Titus Andronicus* and *The Taming of the Shrew*—possessed in an eminent degree a quality without which no poet ever wrote poetry. I mean simply an energetic consciousness and an appetite for life: a zest that displayed itself in verbal fluency and virtuosity, a readiness to experiment, a capacity for intellectual excitement, and a lively observation of the varied forms of nature and humanity. This buoyancy is obvious, and without it Shakespeare would not have become the great poet that he is. But buoyancy alone never made a great poet—let alone a great tragic poet. Great poetry demands a willingness to meet, experience and contemplate all that is most deeply disturbing in our common fate. The sense of life's tragic issues comes to different men in different ways. One of the ways in which it came to Shakespeare is not uncommon; it was simply a heightened awareness of what the mere passage of time does to man and all created things. There are many of the Sonnets that show the impact of time and mutability on a nature endowed with an uncommon capacity for delight. And it is surely no accident that one of the first plays in which we recognize the great Shakespeare—the Second Part of *King Henry IV*—is a play of which the controlling theme is time and change. Put together the 'time' sonnets and this play and you see clearly the beginning

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of the progress that culminates in *King Lear* and the great tragedies.

At the period when Shakespeare wrote the Second Part of *King Henry IV*, however, his concern with the domination of life by time was not an exclusive preoccupation. It did not prevent him from getting on with the business of living or from writing plays that had nothing to do with time's thievish progress to eternity. Neither was it a philosophical interest in an abstract problem. It was simply a part of his emotional and imaginative apprehension of life; and since its expression coincided with a remarkable development of his dramatic power we might presume—even without the evidence of the Sonnets—that it had for him a special significance.

Now a deeply ingrained preoccupation with time almost inevitably brings with it two further allied preoccupations—with death and with appearance and reality. With death, because it is the supreme instance of the disturbing and thwarting aspects of time's action. With appearance and reality because the mere passage of time,

> whose million'd accidents
> Creep in 'twixt vows, and change decrees of kings,

reveals different aspects of things. These new aspects may contradict, or seem to contradict, the impressions to which, assuming them to represent an unchangeable reality, we have committed ourselves; and as a consequence an honest and energetic spirit is forced to ask himself what is solid and enduring in the flux.

There is always the risk of anticipating and imposing where it is our business to discover. But there is no doubt that during the period immediately preceding the great tragedies preoccupations such as these entered deeply into Shakespeare's dramatic poetry. I have already remarked that Shakespeare does not deal with his themes in the manner of one embarking on a dispassionate enquiry into the sources of self-deceit and the domination of men by appearances. All we can say is that the way experience came to him was soaked in feelings and shot through with perceptions that *crystallized out* as the themes of appearance, death, and so on. But the condition of the defining that his art *is*, was that it should remain as close as possible to the level of presented experience; for the defining is, simultaneously, an exploring. Our talk of themes, in consequence, is simply a way of pointing to the centres of consciousness that exert a kind of gravitational pull, to the dominant tones and emphases of a living mode of experience. Moreover, to use phrases suggesting that Shakespeare is simply an analyst of experience is to obscure the urgent personal nature of the imaginative effort and its genuinely exploratory nature. Thus we may for convenience speak of Shakespeare's investigation of the world of appearance; but this is not an investigation proceeding from established positions to logical conclusions. Indeed in *Troilus and Cressida*, of which I now wish to speak, there are no conclusions.

I have said that Shakespeare's way of presenting and defining is not 'philosophical'. But *Troilus and Cressida*, though far from

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abstract, comes nearer than any other of the plays to being a philosophical debate. Greeks and Trojans represent different values, and the things they stand for are the subject of frequent exposition, debate and explicit comment. We shall not do violence to the play or wrench its total meaning if we hinge our analysis on three of the major sequences in which there is a deliberate presentation or development of 'ideas' embodied in the action. On certain conditions: first, that we retain a lively sense of the dramatic context of each formal exposition, with its attendant ironies; secondly that we observe in each instance where the poetry qualifies, and where it enters into and reinforces, whatever may be offered by way of statement. There is a third condition, or qualification, which will be mentioned in due course.

We may begin with Ulysses' famous speech in the first meeting of the Greek generals (I, iii).

> Troy, yet upon his basis, had been down,
> And the great Hector's sword had lack'd a master,
> But for these instances.
> The specialty of rule has been neglected:
> And, look, how many Grecian tents do stand
> Hollow upon this plain, so many hollow factions.
> When that the general is not like the hive
> To whom the foragers shall all repair,
> What honey is expected? Degree being vizarded,
> The unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask.
> The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre,
> Observe degree, priority, and place,
> Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
> Office, and custom, in all line of order:
> And therefore is the glorious planet Sol
> In noble eminence enthron'd and spher'd
> Amidst the other: whose med'cinable eye
> Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil,
> And posts, like the commandment of a king,
> Sans check to good and bad: but when the planets
> In evil mixture to disorder wander,
> What plagues, and what portents, what mutiny,
> What raging of the sea, shaking of earth,
> Commotion in the winds, frights, changes, horrors,
> Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
> The unity and married calm of states
> Quite from their fixture! O, when degree is shak'd,
> Which is the ladder to all high designs,
> The enterprise is sick! How could communities,
> Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,
> Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
> The primogenity and due of birth,
> Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
> But by degree, stand in authentic place?

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Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark! what discord follows; each thing meets
In mere oppugnancy: the bounded waters
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,
And make a sop of all this solid globe:
Strength should be lord of imbecility,
And the rude son should strike his father dead:
Force should be right; or rather, right and wrong,
Between whose endless jar justice resides,
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.
Then every thing includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite;
And appetite, an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce an universal prey,
And last eat up himself. Great Agamemnon,
This chaos, when degree is suffocate,
Follows the choking.

Commentators have been perhaps too much impressed by this piece of rhetoric. One speaks for oneself, but to my mind the only part that by Shakespearean standards is great poetry is the last,—'Then everything includes itself in power . . .' For the rest (in spite of some striking lines), the expansive insistence, the smooth unimpeded rhythms, and the general tone of a public address, denote a formal declamation on one of the great Elizabethan commonplaces. I cannot feel, in short, that Shakespeare is *behind* this speech until his imagination catches fire at the vision of the 'chaos' consequent on the unchecked exercise of 'appetite'. The speech, it is true, is one to keep hold of in reading the play as representing, in its way, a positive. It is at least equally important to observe that none of the Greek generals in any significant sense embodies the order that is talked about; none has the *right* to represent the integration for which Ulysses pleads.

Whatever the claims that the Greek generals may make for themselves[1] the impression we get from their counsels is one of 'policy' rather than of 'wisdom'. To engineer Achilles back into position as 'the sinew and the forehand of our host' they descend to a stratagem that, in the working out, is not a very impressive piece of statecraft. Ajax is to be set up against Achilles and the latter appealed to by his ignoble pride.

Two curs shall tame each other: pride alone
Must tarre the mastiffs on, as 'twere their bone.

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[1]As expressed by Ulysses for example in lines 197-210 of the scene in which the 'order' speech occurs:—

They tax our policy, and call it cowardice;
Count wisdom as no member of the war . . .

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The scene in which Ulysses carries out this characteristic bit of diplomacy gives us the second of the sequences that deserve some special attention. Ajax is flattered, and Achilles deliberately slighted. To him, thus worked on, Ulysses enters reading.

Achilles: Here is Ulysses:
I'll interrupt his reading.
How now, Ulysses!
Ulysses: Now, great Thetis' son!
Achilles: What are you reading?
Ulysses: A strange fellow here
Writes me: That man, how dearly ever parted,
How much in having, or without, or in,
Cannot make boast to have that which he hath,
Nor feels not what he owes but by reflection;
As when his virtues shining upon others
Heat them, and they retort that heat again
To the first giver.
Achilles: This is not strange, Ulysses.
The beauty that is borne here in the face
The bearer knows not, but commends itself
To others' eyes: nor doth the eye itself,
That most pure spirit of sense, behold itself,
Not going from itself; but eye to eye oppos'd
Salutes each other with each other's form;
For speculation turns not to itself
Till it hath travell'd, and is married there
Where it may see itself. This is not strange at all.

It has been pointed out[2] that the 'strange fellow' is Plato, and that in these lines there is an echo of the *First Alcibiades* (132, 133). Socrates, urging that the soul only comes to know itself by contemplating soul and 'things divine', uses the analogy of the eye. (In Jowett's translation, 'If the eye is to see itself, it must look at the eye, and at that part of the eye where sight which is the virtue of the eye resides'.) Now in the Dialogue (which may or may not be Plato's) the analogy is part of an argument that leads up to the

[2]First, according to Mr. K. Deighton, the Editor of the Arden edition of the play, by Churton Collins in *Studies in Shakespeare*. To the instances quoted from Churton Collins may be added 'The unity and married calm of states' (I, iii, 100), which seems to echo a passage in *Alcibiades*, I, 126. Whether Shakespeare derived his knowledge directly from a Latin version of Plato or mediately from another source does not concern us here. Mr. W. J. Craig (I again draw on the Arden note) pointed out that the maxim, 'the eye that sees round about itself sees not into itself', occurs in Nashe's dedicatory epistle (to the Earl of Southampton) of *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594). In the *Hudson Review* (I, 3) I. A. Richards has an essay on *'Troilus and Cressida* and Plato' that seems to me to make large claims that are not, in fact, substantiated.

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necessity for the statesman of self-knowledge. That Achilles uses the Platonic image to express an admirable sense of the need for mutuality and creative interplay is not a violent wrenching of the original analogy. What is significant is the further twist given to the argument by Ulysses, who is concerned neither with self-knowledge nor with mutual relationships. What he is concerned with—indeed the whole set of assumptions on which his statesmanship is based—is soon apparent. To Achilles' 'This is not strange at all', he replies:

> I do not strain at the position,
> It is familiar, but at the author's drift;
> Who in his circumstance expressly proves
> That no man is the lord of anything,
> Though in and of him there be much consisting,
> Till he communicate his parts to others:
> Nor doth he of himself know them for aught
> Till he behold them form'd in the applause
> Where they're extended; who, like an arch, reverberates
> The voice again, or, like a gate of steel
> Fronting the sun, receives and renders back
> His figure and his heat.

The snake in the grass comes out at 'applause'. And in the hard metallic imagery that follows there is nothing at all corresponding to the Socratic argument, nor is there anything of the organic suggestion of Achilles' 'marriage' metaphor. Neither the arch nor the gate of steel can convey any suggestion of creative mutuality. But the implications of these similes are best seen when we have followed the exchange to its end.

There is now a further twist in Ulysses' argument. Man, he has asserted, only knows his true worth in society: he needs society because it gives him honour and applause. But worth, he proceeds to suggest, isn't really necessary to obtain the public 'reverberation'. Society can create an appearance of worth even when there is no substantial basis for it.

> I was much rapt in this;
> And apprehended here immediately
> The unknown Ajax.
> Heavens, what a man is there! A very horse;
> That has he knows not what. Nature, what things there are,
> Most abject in regard, and dear in use!
> What things, again most dear in the esteem,
> And poor in worth! Now shall we see to-morrow,—
> An act that very chance doth throw upon him,—
> Ajax renown'd . . . .
> To see these Grecian lords! why, even already
> They clap the lubber Ajax on the shoulder . . .

That the Greeks do not in fact esteem the lubber Ajax, that Ulysses despises Achilles' craving for applause,[3] and that the whole speech is

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part of a deliberate stratagem, these facts do not affect the underlying significance of what is said. Ulysses thinks throughout in terms of a public world, in which men are manipulated and it is the public appearance that counts.

And now occurs one of the most interesting transitions in the play. To Achilles' exclamation, 'What!' are my deeds forgot?' Ulysses replies with a vivid and vigorous passage on the inevitable connexion between time and oblivion.

> Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,
> Wherein he puts alms for oblivion,
> A great-siz'd monster of ingratitudes:
> Those scraps are good deeds past; which are devour'd
> As fast as they are made, forgot as soon
> As done: perseverance, dear my lord,
> Keeps honour bright: to have done is to hang
> Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail
> In monumental mockery. Take the instant way;
> For honour travels in a strait so narrow
> Where one but goes abreast; keep then the path;
> For emulation hath a thousand sons
> That one by one pursue: if you give way,
> Or hedge aside from the direct forthright,
> Like to an enter'd tide they all rush by
> And leave you hindmost;
> Or, like a gallant horse fall'n in first rank,
> Lie there for pavement to the abject rear,
> O'errun and trampled on: then what they do in present,
> Though less than yours in past, must o'ertop yours;
> For time is like a fashionable host,
> That slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand,
> And with his arms outstretch'd, as he would fly,
> Grasps in the comer: welcome ever smiles,
> And farewell goes out sighing. O! let not virtue seek
> Remuneration for the thing it was;
> For beauty, wit,
> High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,
> Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all
> To envious and calumniating time.
> One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,
> That all with one consent praise new-born gauds,
> Though they are made and moulded of things past,
> And give to dust that is a little gilt
> More laud than gilt o'er-dusted.
> The present eye praises the present object:
> Then marvel not, thou great and complete man,
> That all the Greeks begin to worship Ajax;

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[3]For that will physic the great Myrmidon
Who broils in loud applause. (I, iii, 377-378.)

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> Since things in motion sooner catch the eye
> Than what not stirs. The cry went once on thee,
> And still it might, and yet it may again,
> If thou would'st not entomb thyself alive,
> And case thy reputation in thy tent;
> Whose glorious deeds, but in these fields of late,
> Made emulous missions 'mongst the gods themselves,
> And drave great Mars to faction.

Neither the poetic force of this, nor the fact that it echoes the Sonnets, should lead us to take it, unqualified, as a direct expression of Shakespeare's 'philosophy'. There is an urgency that can only come from feelings deeply stirred; and at one point there is what sounds like a note of personal bitterness,—

> For beauty, wit,
> High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,
> Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all
> To envious and calumniating time.

But it is still Ulysses who is speaking, and Ulysses is still predominantly concerned not with the effect of time on man's life in general but with the relation between time and reputation. Love, friendship and charity are strange intruders from beyond the public world, where what counts is honour, praise and remuneration.[4] It is all perfectly in keeping. Committed to appearances you are inevitably committed to time. Accept time as the governing reality and you can only see 'good deeds' as 'scraps' devoured by oblivion. All that remains is the anxiety-ridden struggle (expressed in the repeated imagery of physical effort, 'keep then the path' and so on) to keep up with the fleeting present. These are the logical consequences of the assumptions that underlie the philosophy of the Greeks. For all their formal dignity they are creatures of time and appearance.[5]

Shakespeare's Greeks stand for public life and an impersonal 'reason', divorced from feeling and intuitive intelligence. The

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[4]'Virtue', it may be noted, does not seek 'remuneration'. It is only the Renaissance 'virtú' that seeks applause.

[5]Shortly after the passage just quoted Ulysses touches on the 'mystery' of state:

> There is a mystery, with whom relation
> Durst never meddle, in the soul of state,
> Which hath an operation more divine
> Than breath or pen can give expression to.

It is one of the play's many ironies that these lines occur when Ulysses is in process of revealing himself as the Greek Chief of Intelligence (the phrase is Dr. Richards').

> All the commerce that you have had with Troy
> As perfectly is ours as yours, my lord.

The 'state' that Ulysses stands for is soulless.

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Trojans are their complementary opposite. Corresponding to the meeting of the Greek generals in the first act is the Trojan council in the second. The question is whether or not Helen shall be retained and the war continued. Of the two leading speakers, Hector appeals to reason and morality, the law of nature and the law of nations, all of which decree that Helen shall be sent back to her husband. He is, significantly, overborne by Troilus, whose idiomatic vigour of speech ('you fur your gloves with reasons') proclaims an intensely *personal* approach to matters that Hector tries to see as examples of a general law. Troilus's theme, like that of Ulysses to Achilles later, is 'honour',—and honour means standing up for your own valuations, for 'What is aught but as 'tis valued?' Troilus is an excellent orator. What could be more reasonable than the tone and manner of the lines in which he counters Hector's objections?

> I take to-day a wife, and my election
> Is led on in the conduct of my will;
> My will enkindled by mine eyes and ears,
> Two traded pilots 'twixt the dangerous shores
> Of will and judgment. How may I avoid,
> Although my will distaste what it elected,
> The wife I chose? there can be no evasion
> To blench from this and to stand firm by honour. . . .

Yet what could be more absurd than to speak of the *senses* as mediating between the judgment and the will? It is the *judgment* that is the pilot or mediator between the senses and the will. Since Troilus has in fact abjured reason,—'Nay, if we talk of reason, let's shut our gates and sleep'—we need not waste time trying to find a moral or psychological system that will make sense of the 'traded pilots' and the 'dangerous shores'.[6] The talk of 'judgment' is bluff,—though it sounds like unconscious bluff. What matters is 'will', and what the will has once 'elected' 'honour' demands that it shall stand by. The scene has a livelier dramatic interest than can appear from quotation or summary. But what is significant for us in the present connexion is that Troilus embodies a mode of judgment based entirely on the subjective ground of passion and will. Hector is there to provide the apt comment,—

[6]'Troilus' terminology is indefinite and the expression of his argument, like so much of the discussion in this play, is far more complicated than its content.'—D. A. Traversi. Wilson Knight's interpretation of 'will' as 'instinctive, unconscious passion' ('The suggestion is that the lover sees his own soul reflected in what he loves. He awakes to self-knowledge by seeing') seems to me to fit neither the immediate nor the wider context. Cressida later makes an apt comment on this speech: 'The error of our eye directs our mind. . . . Minds sway'd by eyes are full of turpitude' (V, ii, 106-108).

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> The reasons you allege do more conduce
> To the hot passion of distemper'd blood
> Than to make up a free determination
> 'Twixt right and wrong.

But it is Troilus who wins the day.

There is the same intense subjectivism in Troilus' love poetry.

> I am giddy, expectation whirls me round.
> The imaginary relish is so sweet
> That it enchants my sense. What will it be
> When that the watery palate tastes indeed
> Love's thrice repured nectar? death, I fear me,
> Sounding destruction, or some joy too fine,
> Too subtle-potent, tun'd too sharp in sweetness
> For the capacity of my ruder powers:
> I fear it much; and I do fear besides
> That I shall lose distinction in my joys;
> As doth a battle, when they charge on heaps
> The enemy flying.

It would be difficult to improve on what Mr. Traversi has said about this and allied passages. There is, he says, 'a poignant thinness' in the love imagery, which conveys simultaneously 'an impression of intense feeling and an underlying lack of content'. Of the passage just quoted he says, 'The emotions . . . are intense enough, but only in the palate and the senses; they scarcely involve any full personality in the speaker'. And he further points out that the expression of Troilus's 'idealism' through the imagery of taste underlines its unsubstantiality and its subjection to time. It is, we may say, the over-active element of subjective fantasy in Troilus's passion that gives to his love poetry its hurried, fevered note, with a suggestion of trying to realize something essentially unrealizable. The actual separation of the lovers, so far from being a turning-point, is in a sense merely incidental, for it only emphasizes what is *intrinsic* to their relationship. The poetry of parting strikes a note almost identical with the poetry of anticipation.

> Injurious time now with a robber's haste
> Crams his rich thievery up, he knows not how:
> As many farewells as be stars in heaven,
> With distinct breath and consign'd kisses to them,
> He fumbles up into a loose adieu,
> And scants us with a single famish'd kiss,
> Distasted with the salt of broken tears.[7]

It is here that I find myself most in disagreement with Mr. Wilson Knight. Mr. Knight makes some necessary distinctions (he was, I

[7]Here, as in the passage last quoted, there is the same sense of grasping at an experience that cannot be articulated 'with distinct breath' (*cf.* 'lose distinction') and realized.

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believe, the first to do so) between Greek intellect and Trojan intuition; but he seems to me to attribute to the latter a more positive value than did Shakespeare. It is not merely that Time slays Troilus's love—'a spiritual and delicate thing'—the whole basis of that love and of the 'idealism' of which it is a part is subjected to as radical a criticism as is the Greek 'reason'. It is Troilus's subjectivism that commits him to a world of time, appearance, and what M. Fluchère calls 'an intolerable anxiety'. It is, in short, not opposed but complementary to the public realism of the Greeks.

I have spoken of a further condition that must qualify our approach to the play through an analysis of the more direct presentation of its major themes in the crucial passages that we have examined. It is difficult to say exactly how we experience the play, not as a succession of parts, but as a living whole. But when we experience it directly in this way it is plain that what we have to deal with, what we are engaged in, is not simply an objective analysis of the ways in which apparently opposed attitudes lead to the same predicament. *Troilus and Cressida*, says M. Fluchère, 'est une pièce à faces multiples, dont les critiques récent ont très justement souligné l'ambiguïté. Sur les deux grands thèmes de l'Amour et de la Guerre se développent les situations les plus propres à jeter la confusion dans l'esprit du lècteur'. In other words, we—the spectators—are directly involved; and it is *our* confusion that largely contributes to the ambiguousness intrinsic to the play. The material that Shakespeare chose to work on was public property. His audience, he knew, would have some preconceived notions about Agamemnon, Ulysses, Helen and the rest. And he weaves these preconceptions into the texture of the play by the simple device of now appearing to endorse them, now turning them upside down. We are rarely quite clear about the judgment we are required to make. In the Greek camp we may imagine for a time that we have in fact before us the wise and dignified figures of legend. But it is not only Thersites who undermines *that* notion: the generals are quite capable of doing it for themselves; and quite early in the play we find ourselves echoing the words of Aeneas,—

> How may
> A stranger to those most imperial looks
> Know them from eyes of other mortals?

Helen, we are reminded by Troilus, is

> a Grecian queen, whose youth and freshness
> Wrinkles Apollo's, and makes stale the morning,

—the figure of legend; but the description of how she 'turn'd crown'd kings to merchants' is not unambiguous praise; and the Helen of the play seems quite at home in the atmosphere of silly smart-talk that Pandarus reports (uncritically and at length) to Cressida (I, ii). As for Cressida, she exists mainly in the imagination of Troilus. So far as she is presented directly, she is the wanton of tradition and is made deliberately to refer to her traditional rôle (III, ii, 195 ff.), as Pandarus immediately afterwards does to his. Yet there is, surely,

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the note of sincerity in her response to Troilus's declaration of love,—'Prince Troilus, I have loved you night and day for many weary months'. The ambiguity that we are made to feel—and not merely to analyse—springs from the shifting appearances of the characters as well as from the trickiness and dubiety of the formal exposition and argument. We, the spectators, in short, are involved in the play's confusions.

We are thus prepared for the way in which Troilus' speech at the play's climax strikes home.

> This she? no; this is Diomed's Cressida.
> If beauty have a soul, this is not she;
> If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonies,
> If sanctimony be the gods' delight,
> If there be rule in unity itself,
> This is not she. O madness of discourse,
> That cause sets up with and against thyself;
> Bi-fold authority! where reason can revolt
> Without perdition, and loss assume all reason
> Without revolt: this is, and is not, Cressid.
> Within my soul there doth conduce a fight
> Of this strange nature that a thing inseparate
> Divides more wider than the sky and earth;
> And yet the spacious breadth of this division
> Admits no orifice for a point as subtle
> As Ariachne's broken woof to enter.
> Instance, O instance! strong as Pluto's gates;
> Cressid is mine, tied with the bonds of heaven:
> Instance, O instance! strong as heaven itself;
> The bonds of heaven are slipp'd, dissolv'd, and loos'd;
> And with another knot, five-finger-tied,
> The fractions of her faith, orts of her love,
> The fragments, scraps, the bits and greasy reliques
> Of her o'er-eaten faith, are bound to Diomed.

Dispassionately considered, these lines complete the demonstration of the identity in opposition of the Greeks and Trojans. Troilus's love—which focuses the Trojan 'idealism', as Ulysses' policy makes manifest the latent implications of Greek 'reason'—has been finally shown as subject to time and change. And he now embodies in his own person the disorder envisaged in Ulysses' speech on degree. But it is hardly possible to consider this poetry dispassionately. The powerful varied rhythms, the marked transition from the quasi-logical manner of the opening to the muscular and vividly sensory imagery of the close, the sheer impossibility of reading the lines without sensing behind them the urgency of a whole personality in the toils,—all these make plain how remote this is from the poetry of statement and exposition. The lines pound with an energy that can find no issue, and we ourselves, in the act of grappling with their meaning, experience something analogous to the physical nausea; evoked in the imagery of the concluding lines, that offers

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the only possible release. This is intended not as rhetoric but as sober description.

> O madness of discourse,
> That cause sets up with and against thyself;
> Bi-fold authority! where reason can revolt
> Without perdition, and loss assume all reason
> Without revolt: this is, and is not, Cressid.

It is possible to paraphrase this—though not without attempting to combine alternative readings. But I do not think anyone can make a determined effort to bring to a single focus the various senses of the last two and a half lines without experiencing directly the dizzy bewilderment whose causes they seem simply to describe. We are made directly aware of what is meant by the metaphor of the abysses of the mind. It is not only the personality of Cressida that yawns apart beneath the appearance of identity, just as it is not only, a few lines later, 'the bonds of heaven' that are 'slipp'd, dissolv'd, and loos'd'. It was a deep non-logical apprehension—yet working with a logic of its own—that prompted Shakespeare to run together, in 'Ariachne', the subtle filament of the spider and the clew given to Theseus. We ourselves are in this labyrinth or web. And it is in the labyrinth of appearances that the play leaves us.

But that was not where Shakespeare was content to leave himself for long. *Troilus and Cressida* implies more than it contrives to say; and what it implies may be best seen if we consider again the play's position within the Shakespearean sequence.

Time dominates many of the Sonnets; time and death, the Second Part of *King Henry IV*. With that as a kind of premise we may express a central line of development as follows. It cannot have been long after *Henry IV* that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*, which is a play about death. The question asked by *Hamlet* (the whole play, not merely the Prince), though obscurely and inarticulately, concerns an obsession with death. Implicit in the play, but not fully conscious, is a sense of the connexion between an overwhelming consciousness of death and a fear of and recoil from life. *Troilus and Cressida* is more articulate in its questioning. Why, Shakespeare seems to be asking, has time its apparently overwhelming power? The answer towards which the play seems to tend is that time is an ultimate reality to those who live in a world of appearance—whether an 'objective' social world, perceived and controlled by the practical reason, a world from which something essential is missing, or a subjective world like Troilus's from which reason is excluded.

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[8]This is not a survey of Shakespeare's dramatic development, but only an attempt to suggest something of its internal coherence. A fuller account would include both *All's Well* and *Othello*, both of which (though in very different ways) are concerned with an inability to recognize a solid reality.

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Now *Troilus and Cressida* raises a further question, which is simply, How do men come to give themselves to appearances?[8] It is easy enough to see that the 'public' world evoked by Ulysses is a world of appearance, and to sense its limitations. But what of Troilus and his love? Wilson Knight says, 'It is the arch-enemy, Time, that kills values. . . . Throughout this play . . . we have a philosophy of love which regards it as essentially un-at-home in time and incapable of continued concrete embodiment in the difficult flux of events'. Similarly Traversi speaks of 'a flaw inherent in the human situation', of Shakespeare's 'sense of the fatal disharmony introduced by time into the love of Troilus and Cressida'. 'The true tragedy of the play' is 'the sense of the impossibility, the meaninglessness of constancy in a world where time dominates human relationships, and where fulfilment and separation seem inevitable and connected aspects of a single situation'. My own feeling is that the play takes us further than that. The most powerful imaginative effect is of bewilderment, ambiguity, of being in the labyrinth. But we have also seen that implicit in the presentation of Troilus (and Traversi himself brings this out) is a criticism of the kind of attitude and the modes of evaluation that Troilus embodies. Put simply, if something vital is missing from the public world of the Greeks, Troilus's subjectivism is equally flawed. This criticism, a point of genuine new growth, is explicit at one point in the play. In the council scene, Act II, Scene ii, we have this:

Troilus: What is aught but as 'tis valued?
Hector: But value dwells not in particular will;
It holds his estimate and dignity
As well wherein 'tis precious of itself
As in the prizer. 'Tis mad idolatry
To make the service greater than the god;
And the will dotes that is inclinable
To what infectiously itself affects,
Without some image of the affected merit.

Here is indicated the direction that any further exploration is forced to take. The lines point directly to *King Lear*, offering us the very terms we have to use in giving ourselves an account of that play. *Lear* opens with an assertion of 'will'. It is a will that 'dotes', so that its possessor is betrayed into rejecting the true good and is delivered to the false appearance. But why does it dote? Because it is 'inclinable to what infectiously itself affects'. What then is 'infection', and what is health? These questions take us to the heart of the human mystery. If *Troilus and Cressida* suggests that subjugation by time and appearance results from false choice and a misdirection of the will, the next step is to bring to consciousness the 'irrational' forces that underlie choice and will. We are forced to ask ourselves nothing less than, What is essential human nature? Still keeping to our patently inadequate formal terms, we may say that it is precisely this question that *King Lear* attempts to answer.

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COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

AUDEN AS CRITIC AND POET

THE ENCHAFED FLOOD, or The Romantic Iconography of the Sea, by W. H. Auden (*Faber and Faber*, 10/6).

AUDEN: AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY, by Richard Hoggart (*Chatto and Windus*, 12/6).

Mr. Auden's Page-Barbour lectures at the University of Virginia show a characteristic mixture of interests and fall into no easy classification. If their starting-point is literature, they reach out into spheres of psychology, ethics, religion and general speculation in a manner familiar to readers of the later poems and particularly reminiscent of the notes to *New Year Letter*. In general Mr. Auden is concerned with certain special ways of thinking and feeling exhibited in the poetic symbolism of the Romantic period, regarded as lasting roughly from 1770 to 1914. Starting from Wordsworth's dream recounted in Book V of *The Prelude*, he notes in it three pairs of symbols: the Desert and the Sea; the Stone of abstract geometry and the Shell of imagination; the two aspects of the hero, part Bedouin (Ishmael) and part Don Quixote. Each of the book's three sections takes as its text one of these pairs. Discussing first the Sea and the Desert as they appeared in earlier literature, Mr. Auden distinguishes their special significance for the Romantics, the sea as 'primitive potential power', the desert as 'actualized triviality'. The various meanings of the Stone and the Shell lead to discussion of Blake's attack on the Newtonian view of the universe, the Romantic reaction from eighteenth-century aesthetic theory with its new stress on imagination, and finally to a statement of the dilemma of the Romantic hero, torn between the desire to merge with the flux of nature and the desire for transcendent stable reality, both impossible to man. The last section is a study of the Romantic hero in relation to the two type-figures of Ishmael, the self-conscious wanderer and outcast, and Don Quixote, seen by Mr. Auden as the self-forgetful, fully committed 'religious hero'. In the last analysis the Romantic hero was the artist himself, and some of the Romantics worked through to a realization that he could only be Ishmael the explorer of possibility, and never Don Quixote. All this is elaborated with examples from Coleridge, Byron, Hopkins, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Poe and Melville: much of the book, indeed, takes the form of an exposition of the symbolism of *Moby Dick*.

It would be surprising if in casting his net so wide Mr. Auden had not drawn up a good many interesting incidental observations. But exactly what discipline, one wonders, is supposed to be controlling all this activity? It can hardly be the psychological,

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philosophical or even theological in any strict sense, and yet it is certainly not the literary-critical in so far as that involves a disinterested concern for particular differences and distinctions, for the attempt 'to see the object as in itself it really is'. At the beginning of the book Mr. Auden speaks of 'the complex of attitudes and styles, called more conveniently than accurately Romanticism', but he uses the term 'Romantic' throughout as if it needed no further qualification or definition. We are constantly invited to gather the common significance from passages of, for example, Baudelaire, Kierkegaard, and Edward Lear as if there were no difference between them, or none that mattered. Mr. Auden's general eclecticism may be seen in the epigraphs from C. M. Doughty, the pre-Socratic philosophers and Cocteau, together with, say, the footnote on page 52 (dealing with the reaction of 'Blake and the other romantics along with him' against eighteenth-century deism):

> For a discussion of these heresies in the light of the Catholic teaching of the analogical relation between the Deity and creation see *Polarity* by Erich Przywara . . . and for the relevance of the Athanasian creed to the artist *The Mind of the Maker* by Dorothy Sayers.

In large statements about the thought of an epoch the quality and value of individual works of literature tend to fall into the background. The abstract generality of the symbolic interpretation is often reminiscent of the pursuit of Archetypal Patterns. Sometimes the significance seems imposed from outside, a matter of mere interpretative ingenuity, as when the lightning stanza in *The Ancient Mariner* provokes the comment, 'Here the Ancient Mariner, so afraid of the Father, is comforted by knowing that the Mother is still present', or in a passage like the following:

> 'The tempestuous liquid sea is dangerous enough, but when it approaches the condition of the solid desert it is worse. For example, the sandbank of the Kentish Knock in *The Wreck of the Deutschland* and the iceberg in Melville's poem . . .'

Throughout, the literature is treated as something from which the symbolic significance may be abstracted and manipulated on its own: the resulting schemes and systems seem more closely related to Mr. Auden's personal speculations about life than to the works themselves. It is not that there is no place for the study of the ideas and attitudes behind literature, but these exist in the first place only as embodied in individual works, and the fundamental activity of possessing the works, of establishing their nature as facts in a public world, must be critical and evaluative. Literary criticism is not just an alternative approach to literature, but the condition of discussing it relevantly at all. The chief objection to Mr. Auden's book, for all its width of reference, its easy command of varying fields of discourse and its sporadic brilliance of comment, is its critical irresponsibility.

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Mr. Hoggart calls his book 'an introductory essay': it is aimed at the general reader and is on the whole straightforward and unpretentious in manner. It devotes a good deal of space to exposition, especially of the longer poems, and to the development of the poet's ideas. Mr. Hoggart can claim to have given a fair account of what Mr. Auden may be supposed to have been trying to do in his poems, but he is aware that intention matters less than achievement. He deals with themes and thought only after chapters on 'Setting and Stance' and 'Technique'.

There is a good deal of sensible criticism of individual poems and Mr. Hoggart admits many of Mr. Auden's characteristic weaknesses—the diffuseness, the pastiche and word-games, the knowing smartness, the rhetorical flourishes, the defensive irony, the exploitation of personal neuroses, the tendency to preach, the over-easy optimism, the uncertainty as to what audience the poet is addressing. He diagnoses the overworked tricks of technique—personifications, otiose similes and adjectives, the see-saw line of balanced nouns and epithets, the mechanical indulgence in epigram—with plentiful and effective examples. Yet he does not seem quite to realize what all these particular criticisms add up to; or rather he appears to suggest that they are outweighed by compensating merits, but for these his evidence is much less convincing. He finds the longer poems, from *New Year Letter* onwards, all rather unequal, and *The Age of Anxiety* 'poetically a failure'. He seems to rate highly the sonnets written in a style influenced by Rilke, *In Time of War* and *The Quest,* but even of these some have 'a suspiciously glossy finish'. His summing up is cautious and unspecific:

> 'He has written a few poems memorable by the strictest standards. By his skill and energy he did much to enliven English verse in the 'thirties, and his present experiments may well do even more for the 'fifties. He has produced some fine songs, and been unusually successful in light ironic verse. Much of his work is faulty, but almost all of it reveals important qualities of imagination, *e.g.*, his extraordinary social and psychological perceptiveness, and his command of the dramatic image'.

Mr. Hoggart would have done better, one feels, to name the 'few poems memorable by the strictest standards' and support his judgment by analysis. But even if we allow the greater part of his rather vague praise, the question remains, What, then, are the grounds for acclaiming Mr. Auden as a major poet and setting him beside Yeats and Mr. Eliot? Mr. Hoggart nowhere makes this claim in so many words, but it is common enough, and something like it seems to be implicit in the whole undertaking of his book.

Mr. Hoggart speaks of promise for the future and attempts to explain present 'inequalities' in terms of the poet's isolation, his lack of an audience, and his experimenting with difficult subject-matter. To these real difficulties he might have added the effect of a lack of serious criticism in the formative period and a reputation too easily

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acquired. Many of us, not incapable of deriving pleasure from Mr. Auden's poetry at its fragmentary and incidental best, can scarcely believe that he has at this late date the inner stamina both to overcome external difficulties and to give a vital organization and discipline to his technical facility. At this crucial level his deficiencies as poet and as critic are seen to be closely related.

R. G. Cox.

MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE by George Kane (Methuen's Old English Library, 12/6).

Dr. Kane has evidently had the best of intentions—the intention (for example) to treat the mediæval romances as poems rather than as linguistic or social documents. Indeed, this intention is offered as the new and enlightened one. Unfortunately, Dr. Kane appears to share with many academic teachers so limited a conception of what a poem is that, if a poem were always merely what he and they suppose it to be, it would be quite uninteresting and trivial. For it is a conception that excludes or ignores all but the most superficial aspects of a poem's meaning. The art of the romances is conceived as the art of narrative; but 'art' and 'narrative', as they are here conceived, are things so very attenuated that they are virtually meaningless abstractions. Thus Dr. Kane can say of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (speaking of Gawain): 'His adventures with the Green Knight are essentially of no great moment, both because little more than his own life could hang upon their outcome and also because that outcome can never really be in doubt; even the simplest 14th century listener must have known that Gawain could not actually lose his head in *this* affair. By way of compensation the finer and more cultivated technique of *Sir Gawain* has protected it against a too rough exuberance, given it elegance and polish. . . .' This kind of thing is what comes of thinking of poems in terms of abstracted 'plot' and 'character', 'form' and 'content'.

Since Dr. Kane insists on applying to the romances a narrowly 'aesthetic' conception—or preconception—of what a poem is, it is scarcely surprising that he can give no good account of why they still deserve to be read. The best he can do is to hark back to the late 19th century notion that the mediæval romances offer, or *should* offer, an 'escape into fantasy'. I quote one or two of his reiterations of this theme. 'The variety of methods employed in those which have any artistic merit at all to induce the escape into the imaginative world of fiction, do not conceal that the main excellence of the kind consists in achieving "the willing suspension of disbelief" '. . . . 'The measure of artistic success in the romances is . . . the extent to which, by means determined in the temperament of their authors, they can enlist the imaginative co-operation of the reader, and satisfy his desire for the escape into fantasy'. . . . 'What is necessary to the literary excellence of the romances, and was necessary at the time of their composition, is the ability of the author to induce in his public, by some means, a ready surrender

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to the experience of fiction'. To be really successful, a mediæval romance *ought*, it seems, to have the qualities that we expect from a pre-Raphaelite poem. (It is not, then, an accident that later in his book Dr. Kane can say also of a mediæval lyric, almost as if it were the highest praise, 'At times it seems almost pre-Raphaelite').

But when the romances are read without any limiting preconception as to what a poem is or should be—when each is viewed as an object or fact, as what it completely is—many of them will be discovered to be much more interesting and important than we could have any notion of from Dr. Kane's descriptions. Inhibited by his narrow conception of poetry (and ignoring, as the academic mind appears to be well qualified to do, the fact that this conception has been challenged by the criticism of the last thirty years) Dr. Kane is unable to recognise in the romances their other than superficial significances and to admit that these significances belong intrinsically to the poem. He is unable to allow that a poem is, in the fullest sense, what it *means*—and that its meaning is not always superficial. He almost entirely forgets also that a poem's structure of meaning is established in and through its imagery and rhythm, from which it cannot be dissociated; and that, therefore, its structure of meaning is *establishable* by the methods of literary critical analysis.

Dr. Kane pronounces judgments on the merits of the romances. He does not shirk, as so many of his academic contemporaries do, that critical responsibility. But since he misses nearly everything that, to my mind at least, is most interesting in the poems, his judgments as to their relative merits appear to me pitifully unconvincing. Indeed, he makes little attempt to convince the reader who disagrees with his judgments (as I personally disagree with many of them) that he is right and his reader is wrong. The critic is surely under an obligation to try to *show* that what he asserts of a poem is in fact true of the poem. He can only do so convincingly by examining the poem itself along with his reader and demonstrating that the significances of the poem which he speaks of really are there as observable features; that is to say, he is under an obligation to attempt to do, in his book, some literary critical analysis. But Dr. Kane, like so many who write about literature, offers his reader little in the way of quotations and of detailed analysis to support and substantiate his general assertions. Students may be prepared to accept him as an authority, at least for the purposes of their examinations, and to take the rightness of his judgments for granted, but they should not be encouraged to do so. (Students should indeed be directed to the poems themselves. But when one looks round for a collection of the romances to direct them to, one finds that there is none in circulation on this side of the Atlantic. There is only the occasional copy of French and Hale's excellent *Middle English Metrical Romances* that has found its way across—a volume which puts the Middle English editorial industry of our universities to shame, or should do so.)

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The Middle English scholarship which is entrenched in the universities (if an activity so uncritical may be called 'scholarship') still persists in ignoring the scholarship that is most relevant to a critic who attempts to apprehend the mediæval romances as what they are. Dr. Kane has been content also to ignore it. Yet among the many excellent workers there have been in the field of the origins of literature there are those who have given the most exact and illuminating attention to the mediæval romances. In particular, R. S. Loomis in *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* and J. L. Weston in *From Ritual to Romance* have shown in the greatest detail, and convincingly, that the romances come at the end of a process—indicated by the titles of these books—a process of evolution from myth (the story of a ritual) to romance. The literary critic continues to ignore their findings at his peril. Once the Arthurian romances—and the other romances that may be associated with them—are recognised as being rooted in an ancient mythology, many of them will at once be seen to be full of meaning and absorbingly interesting *as poetry*. They become recognizable as much more interesting *poems* than they have been superficially understood to be.

For example, if we compare the extant romances we should quickly recognise that certain themes or *motifs* keep recurring in them, though always as variations. The impression grows that these themes are—or were at one time—related.

> . . . workings of one mind, the features
> Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree.

What Loomis and J. L. Weston and others have shown, surely beyond any doubt, is that these themes are fragments of what was originally a coherent mythology. These scholars have gone far to reconstruct that mythology and to identify it. Of course, in the romances new meanings have been created out of these fragments of old meanings; but until we recognize and allow that these are not meaningless fragments but are in fact fragments of *meaning*, we shall continue to refuse to recognize what precisely the new structures of meaning mean, and refuse to allow that they *have* much meaning. But I must not embark here on the book that Dr. Kane should have written.

Dr. Kane refers several times to the importance of discovering the intention of the poet. This confusion between the poet and the poem appears still to be very common—a confusion that is worse confounded when a mediæval poet is thought of as if he were a 19th century pre-Raphaelite. But the notion that the modern reader is required to contrive somehow to put himself in the place of the poet or the original audience is a very curious one—though it serves to bolster up a good deal of irrelevant scholarship. That he should be required to try to discover what a 14th century poem *meant* to a 14th century audience rather than to discover, in reading it, what it *means* shows a strange conception of why people

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should read poetry. Even supposing we can always guess what the conscious intention of the poet may or may not have been, the poem's total structure of meaning—to which centuries of human experience and belief may in some cases have contributed—is not necessarily to be identified with that conscious intention. Poets have themselves testified that a poem may turn out to be different from what they intended or expected it to be. The poem itself, in its totality, and not the man who *was* the poet, is the present and only definite object. What scholarship such as that of Loomis or J. L. Weston *can* do is to put the reader on the alert for significances that may be there in the particular poem he is reading. It remains for him to make sure, by critical reading, that these significances actually are there and to determine the total significance they build up into in the particular poem.

The same limitations and confusions of the contemporary academic mind which afflict Dr. Kane in his handling of the romances afflict him also in his handling of the religious lyrics and of *Piers Plowman*. He remarks of *Piers Plowman*, 'Surely the starting point is this paradox of total greatness and local failures'. It should not be taken for granted that what we have in *Piers Plowman* is not rather a number of local successes and a total failure. But if we approach *Piers Plowman* by making a comparison between it and the other 14th century alliterative poems that happen to be extant—particularly *Wynnere and Wastoure* which appears to be its immediate predecessor in the tradition in which it comes—we might be in a better position to estimate what its particular relative value is. Dr. Kane, however, can fail even to mention *Wynnere and Wastoure*, can say '*Piers Plowman* stands apart from the stylistic groupings of the surviving alliterative poetry', and can speak of the alliterative metre (which he says the poet of *Piers Plowman* handles with 'such mastery') as a 'remote, archaic and provincial measure'.

In spite of Dr. Kane's better intentions his *Middle English Literature* remains not untypical of the kind of book—achieving a prescribed level of conventional dullness—that the English universities now regularly turn out, approve, and inflict on the students of English. Only those who have found something to say will write interestingly and with some distinction.

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